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14. ABSTRACT

Project CHECO was established in 1962 to document and analyze air operations in Southeast Asia. Over the years the meaning of the acronym changed several times to reflect the escalation of operations: Current Historical Evaluation of Counterinsurgency Operations, Contemporary Historical Evaluation of Combat Operations and Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations. Project CHECO and other U. S. Air Force Historical study programs provided the Air Force with timely and lasting corporate insights into operational, conceptual and doctrinal lessons from the war in SEA.

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PROJECT
Contemporary
Historical
Examination of
Current
Operations
REPORT

EVASION AND ESCAPE, SEA
1964 - 1971

4 FEB 72

HQ PACAF

Directorate of Operations Analysis
CHECO/CORONA HARVEST DIVISION

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Prepared by:

MR MEL PORTER

Project CHECO 7th AF, DOAC

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OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF STAFF

PROJECT CHECO REPORTS

The counterinsurgency and unconventional warfare environment of Southeast Asia has resulted in the employment of USAF airpower to meet a multitude of requirements. The varied applications of airpower have involved the full spectrum of USAF aerospace vehicles, support equipment, and manpower. As a result, there has been an accumulation of operational data and experiences that, as a priority, must be collected, documented, and analyzed as to current and future impact upon USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine.

Fortunately, the value of collecting and documenting our SEA experiences was recognized at an early date. In 1962, Hq USAF directed CINCPACAF to establish an activity that would be primarily responsive to Air Staff requirements and direction, and would provide timely and analytical studies of USAF combat operations in SEA.

Project CHECO, an acronym for Contemporary Historical Examination of Current Operations, was established to meet this Air Staff requirement. Managed by Hq PACAF, with elements at Hq 7AF and 7/13AF, Project CHECO provides a scholarly, "on-going" historical examination, documentation, and reporting on USAF policies, concepts, and doctrine in PACOM. This CHECO report is part of the overall documentation and examination which is being accomplished. It is an authentic source for an assessment of the effectiveness of USAF airpower in PACOM when used in proper context. The reader must view the study in relation to the events and circumstances at the time of its preparation--recognizing that it was prepared on a contemporary basis which restricted perspective and that the author's research was limited to records available within his local headquarters area.

John M. McNabb

JOHN M. McNABB, Major General, USAF
Chief of Staff

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A NOTE ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mr. Melvin F. Porter is a Historian for Project CHECO, SEA. A former USAF pilot with 5,000 flying hours, he recorded over 300 combat and combat support sorties, flying fighters in World War II and C-123s in Vietnam prior to leaving the Service. He joined CHECO in October 1965 and has been associated with the Project since that time.

During his tenure in Southeast Asia, Mr. Porter authored the following CHECO reports: Siege of Plei Me, Silver Bayonet, The Defense of Lima Site 36, Defense of Attopeu, Interdiction in SEA--1965-1966, Tiger Hound, Night Interdiction in SEA, Air Tactics Against NVN Air/Ground Defenses - 1965-1966, The Second Defense of Lima Site 36, Short Rounds - 1964-June 1967, Operation Thor, Air Traffic Control in SEA, Air Response to Immediate Air Requests in SVN, Short Rounds - June 1967-June 1968, Control of Air Strikes - 1967-1968, Tactical Control Squadrons - 1962-1968, Second Generation Weaponry in SEA, Commando Vault, The EC-47 in SEA - April 1968-July 1970, and Waterways and POL Pipeline Interdiction - SEA.

In addition, Mr. Porter collaborated with other members of the CHECO SEA team on Attack Against Tan Son Nhut, The War in Vietnam - July-December 1967, The Air War in Northern Laos - November 1970-April 1971, and Local Base Defense in RVN - January 1969-June 1970, among others.

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FOREWORD

Project CHECO has published several reports concerning Search and Rescue in Southeast Asia; however, no one definitive study has been made of the hundreds of Evasions and Escapes that have ended with the successful recovery of these downed crewmembers.

Few subjects have proved to be as resistant to data-analytical examination as has Escape and Evasion, and for a multitude of reasons. Among them are the sensitivity of information regarding yet unrecovered crewmembers, lack of interface of information between the services, lack of retention of data over the many years of conflict, and failure to establish a sole repository of such statistical data for all services. These present drawbacks will unquestionably be overcome through long term future study; for the present they are beyond the scope of this report.

It is recognized that Intelligence has the primary role in Evasion and Escape, but this report will not attempt to detail the evolution of E & E related Intelligence activities during the period of this report. A subsequent report on USAF Support to Special Operations in SEA will fully treat the Intelligence role in E & E.

What this study does intend to present is an empirical examination of the evolution of the techniques of evasion and escape from the early

days of the conflict through the end of 1971. It shows the development of hardware - Life Support Equipment - and its increasing sophistication. The report will trace the growth of the Jungle Survival School at Clark Air Base, Philippines, and its gradual change in emphasis as more and more reports came back from recovered airmen in its continuing efforts to implant this knowledge in the minds of Southeast Asia-bound aircrew members. It will show the interface necessary between the Search and Rescue Task Force and the downed individual, along with necessity for the knowledge of how best to help them help him.

Much of the material for this report was drawn from actual debriefs and narratives of recovered airmen. Many of these, through their inherent drama, would be suitable subjects for novelistic treatment. However, it was from the lessons drawn out of these debriefs that new tactics, techniques, and training evolved to benefit those who followed.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Hide and Seek

By its very nature, Evasion and Escape in Southeast Asia was highly subjective, pitting, as it did, individual human beings against other individuals, usually on the enemy's home territory. It was a potentially deadly game of hide and seek, with the seekers holding most of the advantages: they operated in their own territory, they almost invariably held superiority of numbers and firepower, and had the element of time as an ally--rarely did it serve the evader.

No two successful escape or evasion attempts were identical, although startling similarities existed between a few, and equally startling contrasts occurred. Some evaders, subsequently recovered, did "everything right"; others did "everything wrong," but returned to friendly hands in spite of it. Since there could be no debrief on those who were captured, possibly killed, or listed as missing in action, there was no way to compare accurately the ratio of those successful recoveries to the "right" or "wrong" actions of the downed crewmembers. Strong evidence exists in many of the debriefs, however, to show that more of those who followed the precepts taught them in the various survival schools were recovered than those who did not. The following two examples strongly illustrate this point. In one, the pilot went down in extremely hostile territory

in northern Laos, very close to the North Vietnamese border, surrounded by enemy troops. He kept his head, aided the Search and Rescue Task Force, and although in an indisputably hazardous position, was recovered safely. In the other, the pilot went down "feet wet" in the Gulf of Tonkin, under circumstances which should have led to an easy recovery. Instead, he panicked, complicated the efforts of his would-be rescuers, and in an unlikely sequence of events, managed to make the Killed in Action lists.

Everything Right

On 27 February 1967, Captain James S. Walbridge led an F-105 flight in a strike against a truck park and suspected truck convoy in northeastern Laos. While preparing for a strafing pass against the convoy, Otter 1, Captain Walbridge's aircraft, was hit by AAA fire and flamed out. With his aircraft on fire, he headed in a westerly direction in an attempt to reach a safe bailout area, and when repeated attempts at airstarts failed, he set himself up and ejected at 8,500 feet. The following, in his words, was extracted from his debrief. It shows the many correct actions he took; actions which immeasurably aided him and the SAR Task Force in his recovery.[1/]

> *...I trimmed the nose high, airspeed at 220 knots, placed my feet back, sat erect, pulled leg braces up, gripped arm rests, and squeezed the trigger. The chute deployed automatically about 60 feet above the falling aircraft with minimal shock. After putting my visor up, I checked the canopy and all was O.K. I then unfastened my oxygen mask to breathe easier, and noticed the aircraft impact*

in a dense jungle area 1 and 1/2 miles to the east, and while doing this, turned my beeper radio off. I looked for a landing area, and slipped my chute up a hill toward an open flat rock area on top of the mountain. I made it about three quarters of the way up the mountain side, and as I approached the jungle canopy, I saw that I would land in the trees. So I reconnected the oxygen mask, put the helmet visor down for protection, put my head in my arms with palms of hands under my armpits, and crossed my legs.

Captain Walbridge came to rest against a tree trunk about 85 feet above the ground. He straddled a large branch, and after contacting his flight on his RT-10 survival radio to give them his position and physical condition, secured himself to the tree. The SAR effort was already under way, and Otter 2 descended to get a closer look at the situation. 2/

...As Otter 2 came down, I could see him through a small hole in the tree canopy, and as he came past, I heard about ten small arms shots. I called him on the radio and said, "They are shooting at you, stay high!" I then took one large drink from my baby bottle supply which I carried in my G-suit. I tied the parachute shrouds and survival kit to the tree with suspension lines, took a knife, pulled up the dinghy which was hanging down through the trees in a noticeable position, and punctured it. I then stowed it in the crotch of the tree. I talked on the radio to Otter flight and told them I would be off the air for about ten minutes and then return. I then opened the survival pack, removed the items, putting flares in my flight suit pocket, with the smoke type in my G-suit pocket. I stuffed all the survival items that I could in places on my person to prepare for possible evasion in as light a travelling condition as possible provided I heard someone come up the hill. I took the parachute lines and tied the emergency radio, mirror, and whistle to my survival vest, and removed the parachute beeper radio and strobe light. Sandy lead

gave a call for Otter 1 and I answered that I could read him 5 by 5. He asked where I was, my condition, and if there were unfriendlies in the area. I said, "I am fine, approximately 25 feet under the chute canopy, 85 feet up a tree, will stay here for pick-up, and that I had heard shooting in the valley." He said, "Do you have any smoke flares?" And I reported I had six, three from kit and three I personally carried. I then set up a listening watch and busied myself tying other survival gear to my person, such as watch, hatchet, and food. I took the beeper radio and put it in a pocket of my flight suit so that when rescued, I would not leave any radios to the enemy that they might use to sucker others into a false rescue attempt. Approximately 30 minutes later, another flight of A-1Es called Fireflies relieved the Sandies on rescap. They made contact with me, established where I was, and the Sandies left the area. Firefly lead told me to stay on frequency as he was going to lay down CBUs. He cautioned me to fasten myself to the tree and not to be concerned about the noise. Also, to give him red smoke when he called for it so he could pinpoint me for his bombing run. At his command, I activated the red smoke, and he directed Firefly 2 and 3 to lay down their CBUs down slope from me. In about ten minutes I heard the Jolly Greens approach by means of engine sounds. The Firefly directed the Jolly Green to my parachute. I called the Jolly Green and asked if he could see me and he answered that he could and asked if I was in good shape. I said, "Roger, I am in tree, 25 feet below canopy that you can see, tied to a tree and ready for pickup." The chopper hovered over me, and I then put my flying helmet on and visor down for protection on the way up. The paramedic lowered the jungle penetrator, guiding it to me by leaning out the door. I took it, opened the zipper bag on top, wrapped the nylon strap around me and fastened the catch, opened the seat plate, wrapped my legs around the penetrator, sat on the plate, then took my knife and cut myself loose from the tree. At this time, the tree was swaying from the rotor downwash and it

helped to be tied to the tree. I looked up, gave the thumbs up sign to the paramedic, and they pulled me up to the door of the chopper.

Captain Walbridge commented that the ride back to Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, was the best helicopter ride in the world. His ride back, however, was to a great extent possible by his own actions in the aircraft before ejecting, while descending in his parachute, and while in the jungle; he had done everything right.

Everything Wrong

Not so fortunate was a young backseat Lieutenant who had everything going for him, except himself. On 27 December 1967, Carbine 1, an F-4C from Da Nang, was hit by probably automatic weapons fire five miles west of Quang Khe, 60 miles north of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in North Vietnam. The aircraft commander managed to nurse the crippled aircraft about 20 miles out over the Gulf of Tonkin, giving both Air Force and Navy SAR forces ample time to get the rescue operation under way. The sea state was mild, and both pilots were in their rafts and sighted when the helicopters arrived about 35 minutes after ejection. The aircraft commander popped smoke, and was picked up by a Navy HU-2 without significant difficulty.[3/] The backseater, however, was busily paving the way to his own early demise. With Jolly Green 04, an HH-3E helicopter from the 37th ARRS at Da Nang, in a 30 to 40 foot hover over him, the Lieutenant refused to leave his raft, even though both sides of his life preserver were inflated.[4/] The downwash of the big helicopter simply blew him out from under the rescue aircraft. A Rescue

Specialist was then deployed into the water to assist the Lieutenant in donning the "Horse Collar" type rescue sling. He swam to the survivor and succeeded in getting him away from the raft, but then experienced a great deal of difficulty in getting the panicking backseater into the sling, for the pilot was highly excited and was grabbing at the horse collar instead of slipping into it properly. Only after the rescue specialist deflated one side of the Lieutenant's life-jacket could he get the frightened flyer properly into the horse collar.[5/]

The hoist went normally, but instead of staying with his back to the HH-3 and allowing the flight engineer to pull him into the helicopter, the survivor turned around and grabbed at the engineer to help himself inside. Instead, he slipped from the collar and saved himself from falling 30 to 40 feet only by grasping at the FE's (flight engineer's) arm. While the aircraft commander of the Jolly Green began a descent, the co-pilot came back to help the FE. The backseater slipped from both their grasps and fell about five feet into the water. The co-pilot saw the man in the water drifting to the rear and under the helicopter, so he ran to the rear ramp and opened it. Although the co-pilot could not reach him, he saw the stricken officer thrasing in the water behind the helicopter until a swell covered him and he disappeared. He did not reappear.[6/] The area was thoroughly searched by the helicopters and Navy destroyers but the downed crewman could not be found. He was listed as Killed in Action.[7/] A later report indicated that the lost pilot may have punctured the inflated side of his LPU (life preserver) on a

projecting sump drain of the HH-3E when he fell from the helicopter, leaving him without flotation. However, it appeared that the primary cause of the accident lay in the fatal lapse of memory, on the part of the fighter pilot, about well-known and well-briefed hoist procedures and techniques.[8/]

Neither of the foregoing is an extreme example of the adventures undergone by downed aircrew members between 1964 and 1971, but both serve to illuminate the many facets of escape, evasion, and survival during the period. Training, planning, familiarity with Life Support equipment, awareness of SAR methods, keeping a clear head and avoiding injury or shock, all are reflected in the portrayed examples.

Captain Walbridge's every action, from the time he was first hit, was calculated to give both him and his rescuers the highest chances for successful recovery. He immediately headed his F-105 away from the target area and toward a safer ejection point; he selected an eject-decision altitude and stuck to it, ejecting after making certain he was thoroughly set up for it and in position; he looked around for the best landing area during his descent, and then steered his parachute toward it; seeing he would land in trees, he followed perfect tree-landing procedures to best protect himself from injury; he turned his beeper off so that it would not drown out his voice transmissions. After Captain Walbridge came to a stop in the tree, he displayed excellent judgment in lashing himself and his gear to the tree, and taking a long drink of water to help him avoid shock. Then he set about helping

the SAR Task Force in their rescue efforts.

The Captain called the ground fire to his own flight members and to the A-1Es when they came in, so that they could avoid it or suppress it; he pinpointed his position for them, and gave them his physical condition and situation in the tree so that they could better plan their SAR procedures; he retained and tied his survival equipment to himself, and had an alternate plan in mind should further evasion become necessary. Finally, he followed exact procedures for penetrator and hoist operation, even putting his helmet back on with the visor down to help protect himself from injury during the lift up through the branches.

The unfortunate Lieutenant, with an easy recovery virtually assured, panicked, and in doing so violated almost every known water recovery, hoist and sling operation, and helicopter entry procedure. It cost him his life.

These two examples have been just that - examples. Quite likely, many downed crewmembers "followed the book", but were killed or captured. A great many, by their own admissions, disregarded E and E principles, panicked, injured themselves, or took unnecessary risks, but nonetheless were recovered. The sorties of their experiences, both negative and positive, add up to an impressive library of lessons-learned about evasion and escape in Southeast Asia.

The Hunting Ground

To most, the mention of the word "Southeast Asia", or more specifically, "Indochina", conjures up visions of hundreds of miles of unbroken tropical forest. Indochina (here taken to mean the overall battle arena of North and South Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos), within a few hundred thousand square miles, actually presents almost as much topographical, climatalogical, flora-and-fauna diversity as would the entire United States in summer. With the exception of arctic or true desert survival situations, the area could present a survivor with dense tropical jungle, where a man might take 30 minutes to travel ten feet; to rice paddy areas where he could be seen from a mile away; to mountainous karst regions with cold, wet, nights; to mangrove swamps; to desert-like stretches of sandy beach, where the only concealment might be an occasional shrub; to the best of all, open sea.[9/] To add to this, the face and character of the land over most of Indochina changed twice a year, depending upon the direction of the prevailing monsoon and the overabundance of, or lack of, rain. A man landing in a rice paddy at one time of year might sink in mud above his knees. He might land in the same paddy six months later and break an ankle on the parched, cracked, earth.[10/]

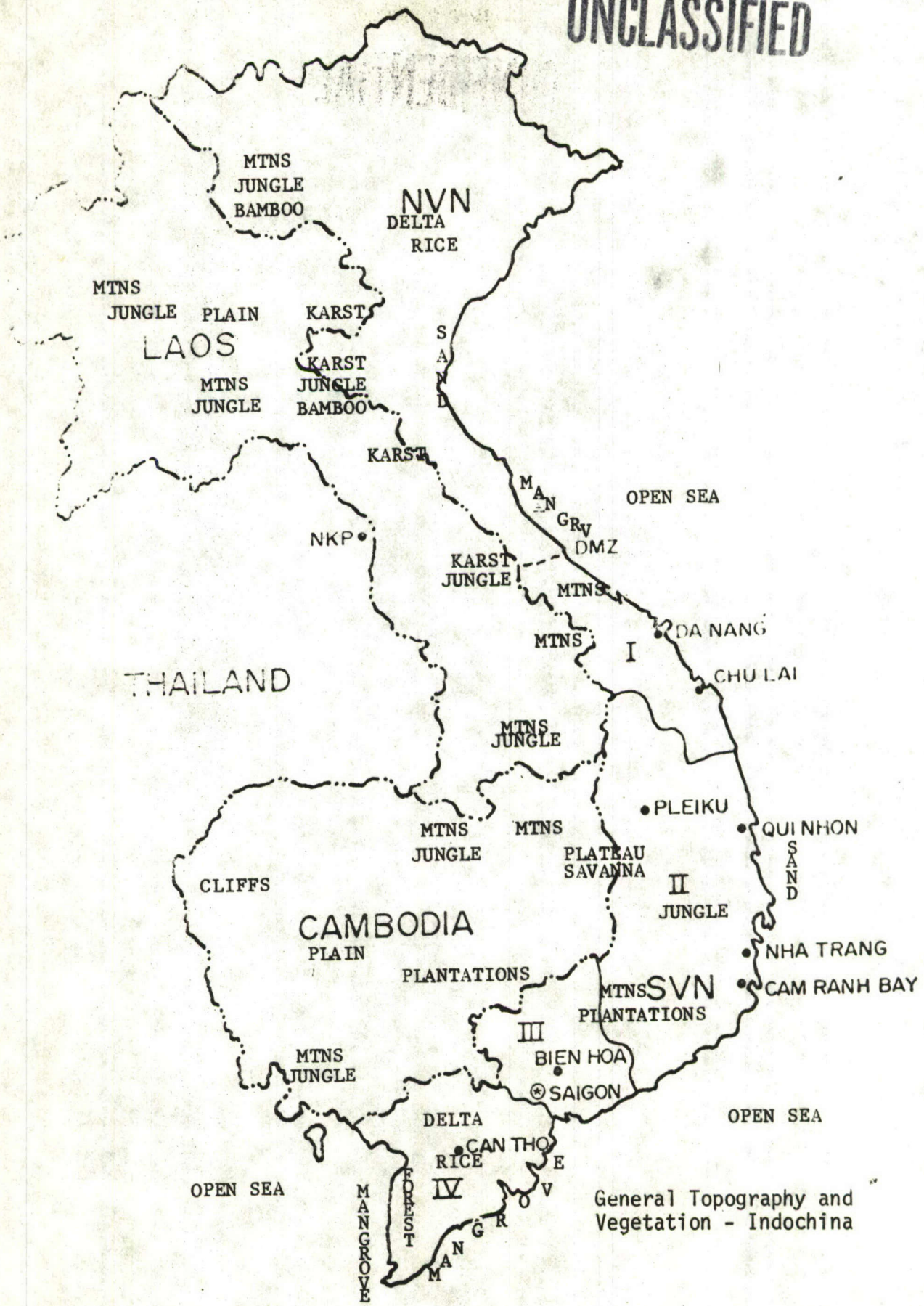
A parachuting pilot often found these areas of diversity alarmingly close to each other. He might aim for the top of a sparsely vegetated limestone outcropping (karst), only to drift over it and come down in a 200-feet high, triple canopy jungle at its base. An inflight diversion could take him from the impenetrable mangrove swamps of the Rung Sat

Special Zone to the naked rice fields of the Delta in three minutes. A crewmember had to be prepared for any of these eventualities.[11/] (See figure, following page.)

Basically, however, and given a broad brush treatment, a downed airman might find himself confronted with the following environments, depending upon that geographical portion of the theater in which he came down. In the Mekong Delta region of South Vietnam he would find totally flat country for the most part, interlaced with tree lines and canals. Much of the Delta was checkerboarded with rice paddies, pineapple and banana plantations, and other farm lands. Mangrove swamps ringed almost the entire peninsula, and in the far western section a dense, low, jungle known as the U-Minh forest constituted a Viet Cong sanctuary.[12/]

North of the Delta along the Vietnamese coastal areas, a survivor would find extensive sand dunes, and sparse cover in scrub brush and desert type vegetation.[13/] Around the northern city of Da Nang, he would face mixed flatland, mountains, heavy jungle, and extensive cultivation nearer the coast.[14/] Of course, South Vietnam's long, narrow geography made egress to the sea a matter of minutes if the aircraft was not so disabled that immediate ejection was necessary.

The Central Highlands of South Vietnam was largely made up of a 1,000 foot elevation plateau, extending from Ban Me Thuot in the south to above Pleiku in the north. It was dotted with numerous higher peaks,



General Topography and Vegetation - Indochina

FIGURE 1

and surrounded on the north, east, and south by mountains. Tropical broad leaf jungle and bamboo covered extensive portions of the plateau, but these were interspersed with farms and plantations.[15/]

Laos

The evader coming down in Laos was most likely to find himself in the mountainous area north of a line between Sayaboury and Xieng Khoang (but including the relatively flat Plaines des Jarres), or near its eastern border with North Vietnam and down the Ho Chi Minh trail.[16/]

In the north, tortuous mountain country covered with monsoonal and scrub jungle, alternated with extensive grass-covered flatland. Dense clumps of bamboo on lower slopes would impede an evader's progress, but also provide excellent concealment.[17/]

The area along the North Vietnamese border and down the Ho Chi Minh trail provides some of the most starkly contrasting topography and vegetation in Indochina. Sharply rounded limestone outcroppings rise vertically out of triple canopy jungle or bamboo clumps. Along stream beds, where the plants can get ample sunlight, dense gallery forests thrive, filled with an undergrowth of bamboo and thorn vines. Above 2,000 feet, the typical tropical forests give way to trees and vegetation more commonly found in temperate zones, such as pines and oaks, and around 6,000 feet - in some regions where the tops are perenially in the clouds - may be found moss forests, the trees festooned with moss and lichens.[18/]

Southern Laos is less mountainous, but with the usual tropical vegetation. Along the bank of the Mekong River, a more or less broad alluvial plain reaches east to the foothills. Most of this plain is under cultivation or left to grassland savannah.[19]

North Vietnam

Most of the western regions of North Vietnam have a topography, climate, and vegetation similar to that of bordering Laos, i.e., karst outcroppings, often honeycombed with caves formed by dripping water, primary or secondary jungle, bamboo thickets, and occasional clearings formed by the "slash and burn" agriculture of the indigenous personnel.[20]

Of the flat land nearer the coast, most is given over to cultivation of rice, manioc, bananas and other cash or food crops. The population density pushed back the jungle as far as it profitably could, stopped only by the mountains. The coast is generally sandy or muddy, with scattered mangrove patches in muddy areas, where their aerial roots tangle into an almost impenetrable barrier to travel.[21]

The Haiphong and Hanoi areas are practically urban, but the Red River Delta areas to the northwest are not unlike the Mekong Delta in South Vietnam, with extensive rice paddies and dikes. These extend to the northern highlands. This ring of mountains, through which the Red River flows, is carved by steep, narrow mountain gorges with rapid streams at the bottoms, walled by thick bamboo, with rain forest at higher elevation.[22]

Cambodia

Cambodia is largely a plain, with the Cardamon Mountains dominating the southwest, sheer cliffs near the western border, and the Annam Chain of mountains cutting across the northeast. Over half of the country is made up primarily of jungle, punctuated with plantations - especially in the southeast - and rice paddies, along with other cultivated crops. An evader down in the forested areas would encounter vegetation not unlike that described for other regions in Indochina. The same would hold true in the cultivated areas. (See photos of different E & E environments, following pages.)

Fauna

Animal life in Southeast Asia never proved to be a significant factor in Evasion and Escape incidents. Tigers, bears, wild elephants, and other potentially vicious creatures did exist in the jungles, but none were known to attack or even bother an evader; for the most part, they seemed far more anxious to get away from the survivor than to get to him. Far more dangerous were bites from tinier foes, mosquitoes, ticks, and leeches. Venomous snakes also presented a valid threat, but like the animal life, were harmless when left alone. In his well-publicised narrative, Dieter Dengler said: 23/

> *...When it got lighter in the morning, we were able to walk. Along the side, the vines were hanging over and there were branches. We had to be careful of snakes. Two or three times Duane would say, "Watch it, a snake." There would be green snakes hanging onto the vines. They would coil back and we would duck away.*

Dengler did not indicate whether the green snakes were venomous or not, but he clearly implied mutual respect between man and snake so that each could go his own way. (The Dengler debriefing will be covered in more detail in the chapter of this report titled, "A Few of the Escapes.") The green snakes mentioned by Dengler could have been Bamboo Vipers, but no recoveree, in his debriefing, ever mentioned encountering the dreaded Cobra or Banded Krait during his adventures in the jungles.

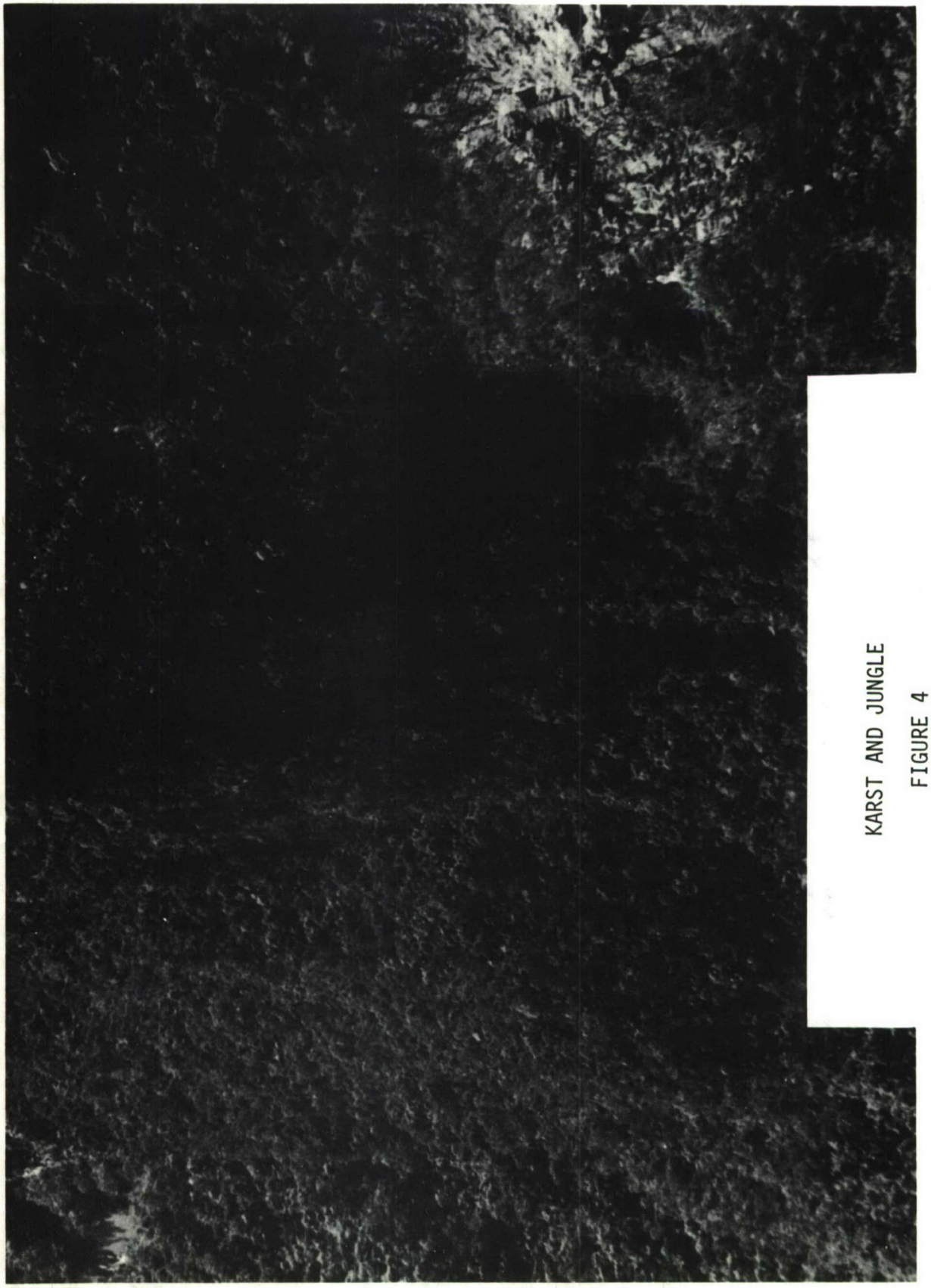
Perhaps the greatest single enemy encountered by downed crewmembers in the jungle environment was their fear of it (although peoples have lived and thrived in it for thousands of years). The greatest weapon against fear proved to be knowledge and training, and as the air war escalated in 1965, the realization of this resulted in the establishment, in the Philippines, of formal Jungle Survival Schools, both Air Force and Navy, to provide that training.

THE MEKONG DELTA

FIGURE 2

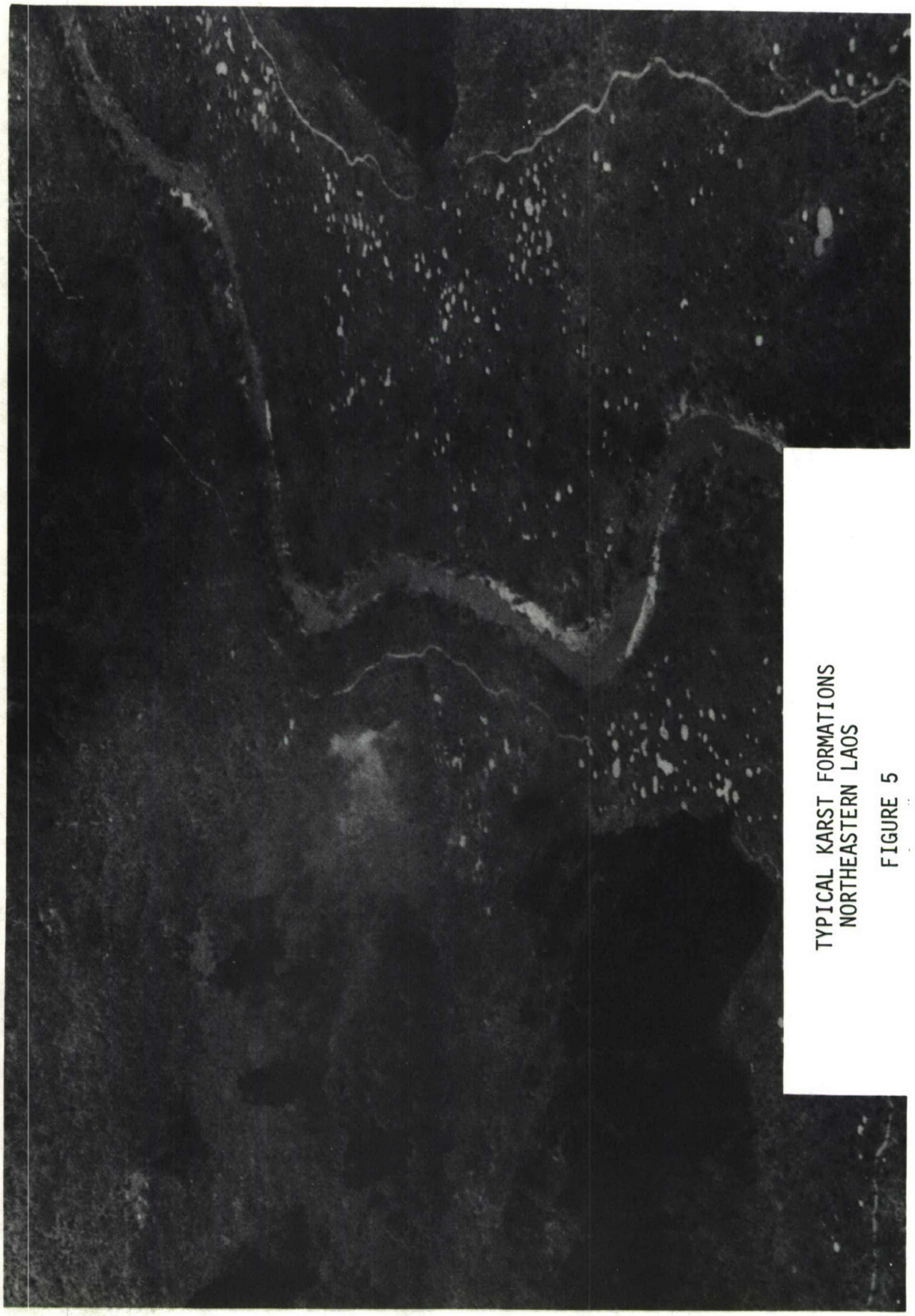
TRIPLE CANOPY JUNGLE

FIGURE 3



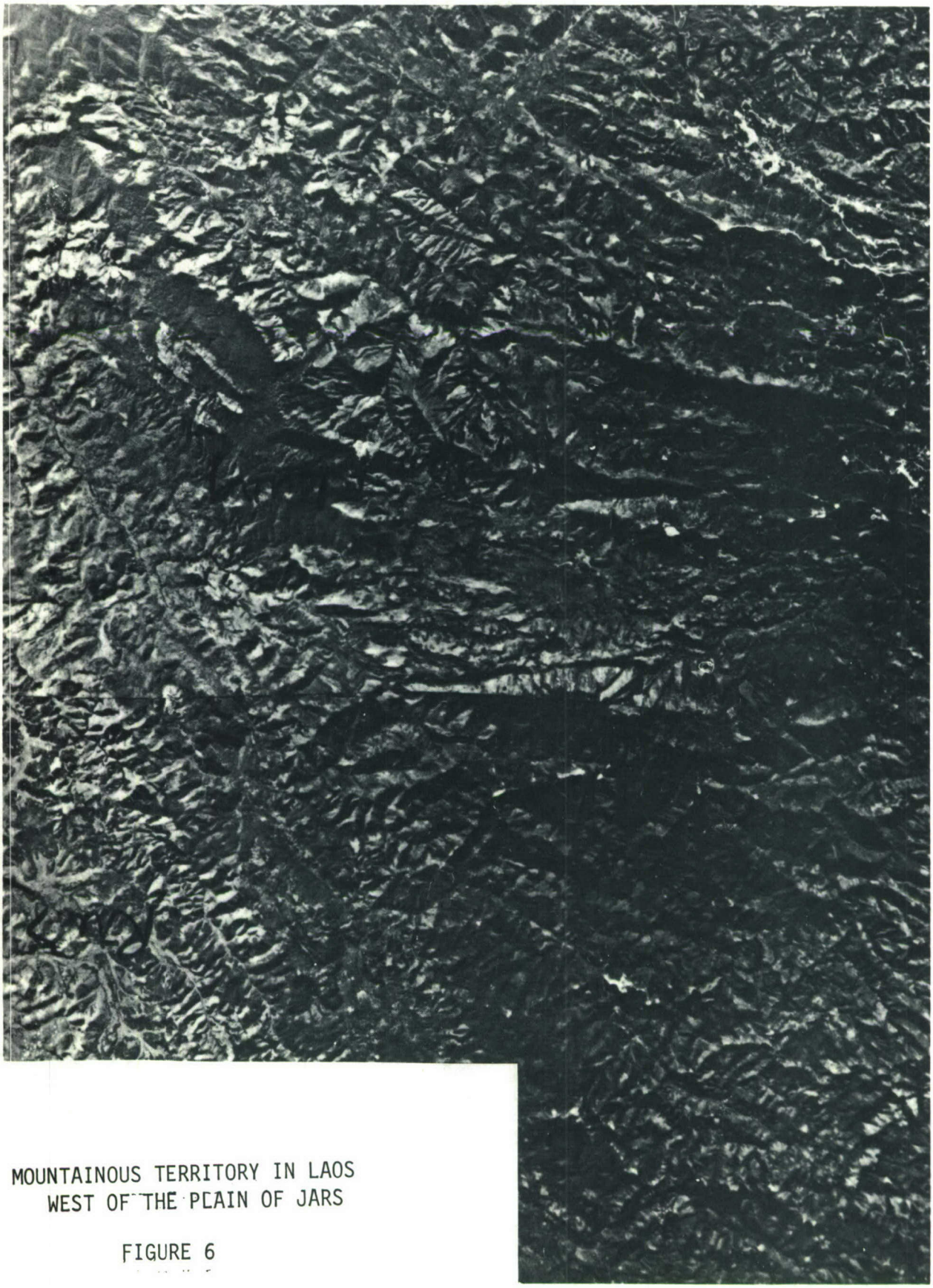
KARST AND JUNGLE

FIGURE 4



TYPICAL KARST FORMATIONS
NORTHEASTERN LAOS

FIGURE 5



MOUNTAINOUS TERRITORY IN LAOS
WEST OF THE PLAIN OF JARS

FIGURE 6

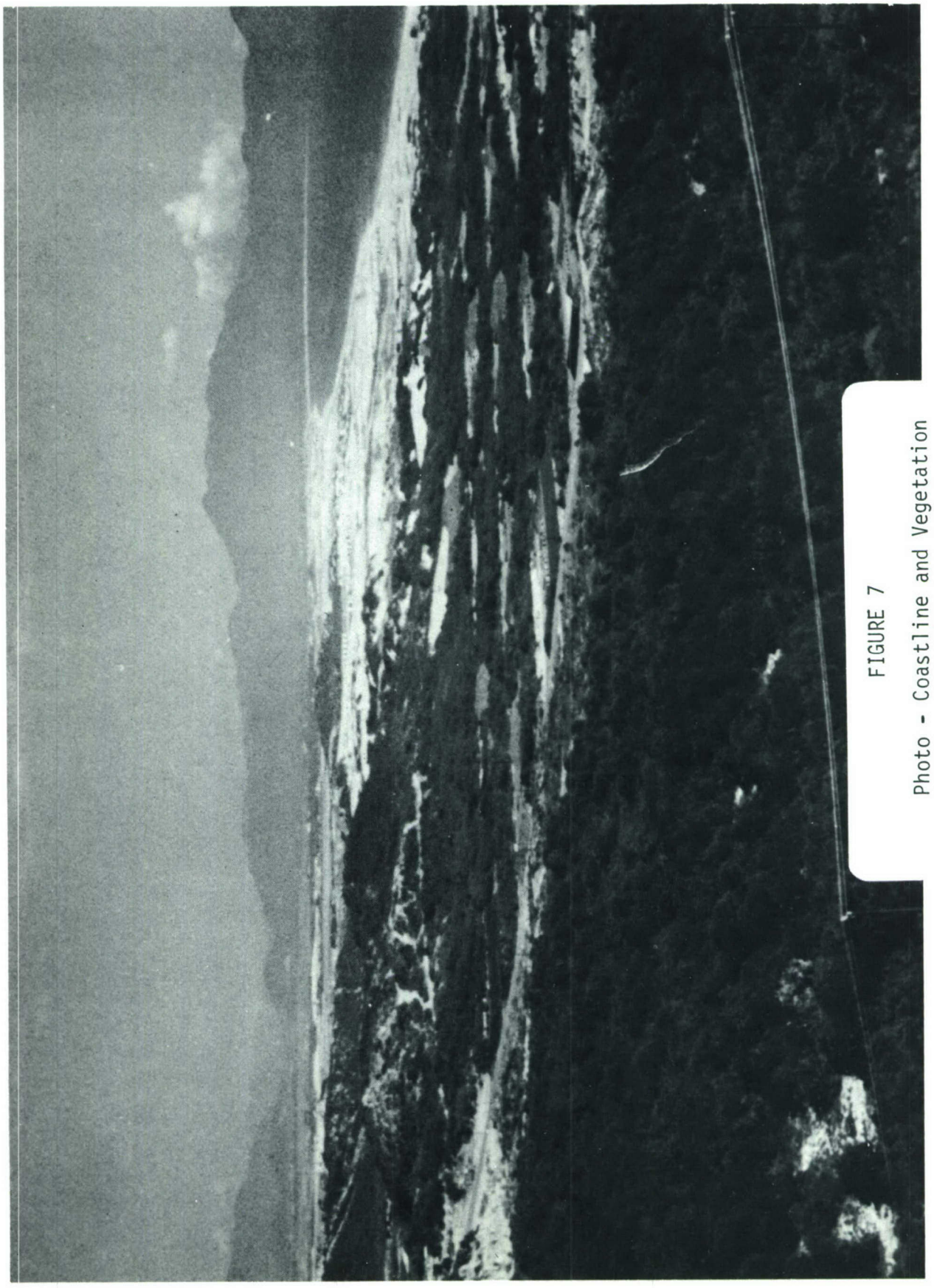


FIGURE 7

Photo - Coastline and Vegetation

CHAPTER II

THE TRAINING

Survival Schools

Numerous survival schools had been operated by the USAF and its sister services for years, providing training to aircrew members in evasion-and-escape, resistance to interrogation, and survival techniques. These schools or courses gave this training in varying degrees of thoroughness and specificity depending upon many factors, such as command guidance, size and formality of the organization, and location. Stead AFB was the site of the USAF Basic Survival School for many years until the base phased down and Fairchild AFB, Spokane, Washington, became the home of the USAF Survival School. Many of the major commands had their own schools, emphasizing one or more of the SERE (Survival, Evasion, Resistance, and Escape) elements, depending upon the stress placed upon them by the command. Thus, USAFE had a Water Survival School at Wheelus Air Base, Tripoli, Libya, and an E & E School at Ramstein, AB, Germany. The latter stressed evasion, capture, simulated POW treatment, and resistance techniques. The Tropical Survival School at Albrook AB, Panama, placed heavy emphasis on extended survival in a tropical environment, along with E & E training.

Several other schools existed, such as Arctic Survival Schools at Thule AB, Greenland, and Ladd and Elmendorf AF Bases, Alaska, and a Desert Survival Course at Laredo AFB, Texas, among others. The Navy had its primary school, SERE, at San Diego, California, and JEST (Jungle

Environmental and Survival Training) at Cubi Point, P.I. PACAF established two schools, the PLSS (PACAF Life Support School) at Kadena, and the PJSS (PACAF Jungle Survival School) at Clark AB, Philippine Islands. The former featured water survival, using para-sail equipment, while the PJSS emphasized jungle survival initially.

The Early Years of the Conflict

In 1964, as significant numbers of aircrews were beginning to be sent to Southeast Asia, few were prepared for the experience of being downed in the Indochina combat environment. Most had attended the USAF Survival School at Stead AFB, Nevada, and a few had had the opportunity to go through the Tropical Survival School at Albrook, Panama. A very few in-theater were selected to fill a small quota allotted by the Royal Air Force's Jungle Survival School at Singapore. This afforded excellent training, but was limited to such a small percentage of the incoming crews as to be insignificant compared to the number who really needed it.[24/]

It was during the latter part of 1964 and early 1965 that the needs were fully recognized for a specialized jungle survival, evasion, and escape course to cover those aspects of SEA that could not be fully treated at a generalized school, such as that at Fairchild AFB. As USAF combat involvement increased, starting with the Rolling Thunder campaign over North Vietnam in February 1965, the need became more and more apparent. Aircrews survival-trained in January, sloshing through the snow of northeast Washington State, were not being really prepared for what awaited

them if they had to eject over a monsoonal forest of Vietnam four months later. Headquarters USAF directed PACAF to establish a school to "provide SEA bound aircrews with Jungle Survival techniques and procedures, Southeast Asia indoctrination, practical application of evasion and escape techniques peculiar to SEA, and rescue procedures."[25/] The PACAF Jungle Survival School was officially designated at Clark AB, P.I., on 12 April 1965, in compliance with Hq USAF requirements for USAF aircrews being assigned to Southeast Asia.[26/]

The initial work on building the school started in March 1965, with the arrival of four TDY personnel from Stead AFB, Nevada. These four were phased out beginning in June 1965, with the arrival of the first four PCS personnel from CONUS. Facilities were primitive at first, and class quotas were small. The first class to take the field, in June of that year, consisted of six students and four instructors, with assistance of the soon-to-depart TDY instructors.[27/] The course was scheduled for a once-a-week, five-day curriculum. The numbers of students scarcely exceeded that quota allotted to the RAF school, which - near the beginning of 1965 - was allotting the USAF but 15 spaces every two weeks, and of these, 2nd Air Division in Vietnam was tentatively assigned six.[28/]

The initial class of six at the PACAF Jungle Survival School was expanded in succeeding weeks to 12 and 15, and by the end of the year had reached 50 or more.[29/] Concomitantly, more instructors were added, and

with a great deal of self-help and aid from the Civil Engineers at Clark AB, the physical set up of the school began to take shape. Classes initially were held in quonset hut classrooms on the flight-line, but following the acquisition of property on the north end of the base, facilities began to take shape there until it was built into the pleasant, park-like "campus" that existed at the end of 1971. (See Figure, following page.)

Vegetation brought in from the jungle was transplanted onto the campus so that students could see first hand which plants could provide them with food, water, or primitive medicines, and which were hazardous, poisonous, or irritating.[30/] A zoo, herpetological enclosure, and an aviary gave the students the opportunity to see the various animals, snakes, and birds they might encounter if downed.[31/] On another section of the school, various training aids were constructed, such as a rappelling tower, where they could practice with the personnel lowering device, and a scaffold from which hung a forest penetrator and horsecollar.[32/] These, along with the classroom work, prepared the students for the field portion of the curriculum, including an overnight stay in the jungle and the evasion and escape exercise with the Negritoes.

In August 1966, the school was authorized pilots and operational control of three H-19s with which to train students in the pick-up phase of recovery operations.[33/] Among the initial helicopters pilots in that portion of training was Major Gordon H. Lowery, who was the Commandant

of the school in 1971. For the first time, the trainees could physically participate in a simulated recovery, signalling the helicopter with mirrors, panels, or flares, mounting the forest penetrator, and receiving an actual hoist up into the helicopter. Such practical training gave the students a taste of reality in training, usually for the first time.[34/]

The Shift of Emphasis

During the early days of the school, heavy emphasis was placed on the survival portion of the curriculum. Students were trained in construction of shelters, setting snares, and living off the land. As more and more recoveree debriefs came in, letters of appreciation from downed-and-recovered aircrews, and actual classroom lectures by returned crewmembers, it became apparent that the pure survival training being given was overstressed. A man could live without food for up to 14 days, if he had water; but, over 90 percent of all recoveries were made within 24 to 48 hours. The returned-reports indicated that the most valuable training the students had received was in the areas of jungle familiarity, evasion, and life support equipment. The survival portion of the syllabus received less and less emphasis, while more time and effort was spent on teaching the students how to use their life support equipment, avoid panic, alleviate shock, find concealment, and aid the SAR Task force.[35/]

Numerous returnees had mentioned that they did not dare build a shelter or a fire, or attempt to forage for food, because of the proximity of the enemy, but many told of how they could have used more training on

the use of the rappelling device, use of their RT-10 or URC-64 survival radios, and concealment. (Well concealed evadees were actually stepped on by the enemy while downed, but were undetected and eventually recovered.)

Basic survival fundamentals were continued, but the emphasis turned to rescue contact, pick-up, life support equipment, hiding, and evasion.

Life Support Equipment Training

Time and time again, debriefs stressed the importance of the life support equipment - that hardware to get a man safely from his disabled aircraft to the surface, sustain him while he was there, establish contact with rescue forces, and aid in his recovery. It became increasingly clear that chief among items of equipment, was the survival radio, either the RT-10 or, later, the URC-64. The RT-10 was a single channel Ultra High Frequency (UHF) radio which transmitted on Guard frequency, 243.0 megahertz. Operated by a battery attached to its back, it was turned on by pulling its telescoping antenna out to full length, then pushing the transmitter switch to either tone or voice. The URC-64, more sophisticated version, had four channels, and an interior battery. Like the RT-10, it was turned on by extending the antenna, and also like the RT-10, it transmitted in two modes, swept tone and voice. However, it had the additional features of variable volume, a battery test meter, and a plug-in earphone for "silent" listening.[36/]

The survival radio was the ultimate link between the downed survivor and the recovery forces, yet debriefs revealed hundreds of cases where lack of knowledge, mishandling, or poor technique came close to compromising the rescue effort, thereby jeopardizing not only the survivor, but the lives of those in the SAR Task Force.[37] These sins of omission or commission included (but were not limited to): using the radio while descending, then breaking the antenna off when coming down through trees; failing to extend the antenna to its full-out position, thus not turning it on; grounding the antenna by letting it touch foliage or grounding it by touching it with the hand; improper battery installation; draining the battery by overuse; failure to check battery before flight; and pointing the antenna directly at SAR aircraft, thus presenting them with a "cone of silence."[38]

Use of the survival radios went into the Jungle Survival School syllabus as a Special Emphasis Required course. The trainees were taught its capabilities and limitations and how to take care of it, and were schooled in its operation until they could use it in the dark.[39] The broken antenna problem recurred so frequently that an antenna extension wire with an alligator clip was included in the survival equipment.[40]

There were certain mandatory items carried in the SRU-21/P mesh net survival vest; most crew members carried other, optional, equipment. The minimums, as established by PACAF Regulation 501-6 were as follows:[41]

- Radio, URC-64, or designated suitable alternate, with battery. (The alternate would normally be the RT-10. A spare radio could also be carried, and usually was, along with one or more spare batteries.)

- A Gyro Jet Flare. (This powerful flare would penetrate jungle canopy, rise to around 1,500 feet, and give off a distinctive array of colors.)

- Insect Repellant/Camouflage Stick.

- Lensatic Compass. (An Army-developed, folding compass, easily adapted to vectoring SAR aircraft to a survivor's position or taking a bearing on enemy ground fire to pass on to RESCAP aircraft.)

- Tourniquet.

- Signal Mirror, 2" by 3".

- Acoustical Coupler. (Slipped over the mike-earphone of the survival radio by an elastic band, the acoustical coupler silenced the noisy hiss usually generated by the radio speaker. It allowed either transmission or reception silently.)

- Two flares, MK-13, Mod 0. (These were double ended day-night flares, the day end emitting dense smoke and the night end giving off a very bright light. Trainees and recoverees discovered that the smoke would often not penetrate thick jungle canopy or would be dispersed by helicopter rotor blades, and under these conditions, the night end often supplied enough light for the SARTF to pinpoint the survivor's position even in daytime. Many crewmembers carried extra flares.)

- Earphone, with carrying case (URC-64 radio only).

- Antenna Emergency Wire.

- Revolver, .38 caliber, with ammunition. Fifty rounds maximum, of which six must be tracers.

- Evasion and Escape Kit. (This small plastic kit contained other important items such as wire saw, blood chits, E & E maps, and a pencil with the graphite core hollowed out and a small, tough file placed in the eraser end.)

Most aircrew members carried other items which they felt would aid them in a downed situation, even if only to add a sense of heightened security and comfort: knives, an extra small gun, button compasses, fishhooks and line, pen gun flares, and small flashlights. The Jungle Survival School had a suggested layout for items in the vest and on the body, G-suit, or flying suit, but also cautioned the students that their particular unit might have a slightly different arrangement depending upon their mission and aircraft, and told the trainees to check this upon arrival at their assigned stations.[42/]

Among the items stressed, both by the JSS and by Life Support people, were a few "Do's and Don't's" having to do with the equipment. One was the making of the "four line cut," cutting - or pulling lanyards which released them - lines 1 and 2, and 27 and 28, on the back of the parachute. This opened the chute up slightly in the rear and, without significantly increasing the rate of descent, greatly aided in stabilization and steering. Another had to do with the seat kit, a 30 pound-plus kit containing mostly items of basic survival. Attached to the crewmember by a lanyard, the kit could be deployed to dangle beneath the parachuter, or kept attached to him at his choice. Over water, it was strongly recommended he deploy it, for its contact with the water would give the descending crewman an accurate estimate of his distance from the surface, and also would simplify his getting into the raft, and other water-survival procedures. If the survivor were over land and coming down in a cleared area, it was also recommended he deploy the kit. This would remove the

heavy kit from the backs of his legs, in which position it had been known to cause fractures upon contact with the ground. However, when coming down in trees, students were encouraged to retain the kit. Retained, it helped break the shock of crashing through branches; deployed, it often caught in branches, frequently in a different tree than that which snagged the parachute, so that the survivor found himself stretched out in a horizontal position between them. A third point often stressed concerned placing life support items (extra batteries, water bottles, knifes, etc.) in pockets below the knees, or strapped to the calf of the leg. These items added weight and bulk. During ejection, with the body hurled violently out into space, the extremities often acted not unlike the snapping end of a whip. Arms and legs flailed uncontrollably, and with the weight around calves and ankles, many sustained broken legs during the ejection sequence because of these added stresses. Specialists in Life Support briefed incoming crews repeatedly to ". . . get that equipment above the knees and leave your lower legs clean and light."[43/] The amount of force generated during an ejection could be hard to visualize, but ample evidence existed to prove it. In one example, a pilot carried a nine-inch hunting knife in a heavy leather, brass riveted sheath strapped to the side of his boot. The forces generated during his ejection drove the blade of the knife through the sheath, his boot, heavy stockings, and deep into his foot, disabling him to the point where he was virtually unable to assist his rescuers.[44/]

The Peak Years

In early 1967 the Jungle Survival School began its dual program, cutting the length of the course to four days, but scheduling two classes a week. While the first class was completing its two days in the field, the second class underwent classroom and campus training.[45/] The number of students going through the school began to peak during this period: in 1967, the monthly average input was between 800 and 900; in 1968 it was even higher, several times in the neighborhood of 1,000 trainees.[46/]

In addition to the training provided at Clark, seven mobile units of PJSS instructors were made up in 1970 to provide a type extension course to units in Southeast Asia. These teams were deployed throughout SEA to units whose commanders requested them for aircrews who had been unable to go through the Jungle Survival School because of immediate operational commitments in the combat zone.[47/]

From its inception in April, 1965, until the end of 1970, the PJSS trained 42,655 USAF personnel in evasion, escape, and survival. In actuality, however, the school had a far greater total throughput because USAF aircrews were not the only people receiving E & E training. In 1970 alone, 6,736 USAF men were trained at the school; 2,284 classified personnel were trained; 177 U.S. Army people went through the course; the Marines had 123, and the Navy had four. In addition to these, there were 50 Vietnamese students, 12 Thai trainees, eight Koreans, and two

Australians who went through training at Clark. With another 5,027 trained by mobile teams in Vietnam and Thailand, the total of 14,423 students trained by the PJSS averaged well over a thousand a month for the year 1970.[48]

The PACAF Jungle Survival School was transferred to 13th Air Force, Clark AB, Philippines, on 1 October 1969, and on 1 April 1971 was designated the 3614th Combat Crew Training Squadron (Jungle). The school was assigned to the 3636th Combat Crew Training Group (Survival), Air Training Command, Fairchild AFB, Washington, on 1 April 1971.[49] The course title was shortened to Jungle Survival School.

Feedback and Appreciation

The motto of the Jungle Survival School was "Learn and Return." This worked both ways, however. From debriefings, letters of appreciation, and guest lectures by recovered aircrew members, the school itself learned much from its former students. To a great extent, this feedback changed the emphasis of the course from pure survival to fit the realities of the combat theater - evasion, concealment, escape, life support equipment, and aiding the SAR Task Force.[50] As noted by the 7th Air Force Life Support Officer, who had been closely involved with the school since its inception, this feedback was important.[51]

> *. . . Having had the men who actually went down, coming back to the school as part of a program we've always run, to do two things; one, to let the Survival Instructors debrief these men on all equipment they used, and their techniques and so forth, as well as their own special story, if you*

will. And, we tried to glean something out of it, to help somebody else in the future. More and more, as we looked at it, we saw that it was the man who knew the SAR procedure techniques, and knew his equipment - he was the one who always had the best and fastest pickup.

Early debriefs revealed that downed crewmembers had only a sketchy knowledge of how to vector RESCAP or rescue helicopters over their position, or how to FAC for the fighters in suppressing ground fire. These procedures were stressed in the course, and at the end of 1971 were an integral part of the curriculum, with extensive classroom work and a final field exercise using the Lensatic compass and URC-64 radio to vector HH-3E helicopters in over the simulated survivor's position.[52/]

That Jungle Survival School training was effective was attested by the many debriefs in which the JSS was credited with being the difference between being recovered, or being killed or captured. Not atypical was the narrative given to the JSS class of 30 December 1971 by Captain Lester O'Brian, an F-4 backseater from Udorn RTAFB, Thailand. He recalled:[53/]

. . . I was sitting here about three weeks ago. I graduated from this course about the third of December. Three weeks ago I was sitting over there in Seat Number Nine. I was listening to the guys talk, and taking it in, but it was sort of like, 'Well okay, that's well and good, but hell, that'll never happen to me.' But I got to my unit at Udorn, and on my fourth mission I had to punch out.

. . . Everything I did, from that point on, it was something somebody said from some survival school saying, 'Now this is what you do.' First of all, I did just what they said, and looked up to check

my canopy. I had no holes in it or anything, but my two main lines were twisted, so I just grabbed them and gave a twist and they straightened out.

. . . I stepped out [of the harness] and, just like the guys said, I wanted to run like hell as soon as my feet hit the ground. So again, I went back to the only thing I had to go on, what the guys here at the survival school had said. So I did what Sgt Martino there always preaches, and I reached down and got my canteen out and washed the taste of fear down my throat.

The Captain was shot down on December 20th and was rescued the following day, after spending the night under a fallen log in the jungle. His survival school training had negated any fear he might have of the jungle, and in fact, he slept most of the night in his hideaway.[54/]

Captain O'Brian's two and a half weeks with his unit before going down in enemy territory was by no means a record. The record was held by a young man who graduated from the school and went on to his unit in South Vietnam that evening. Next morning he was shot down, wounded by small arms four times while evading a VC company, suffered through a failed rescue attempt and had to again become part of the jungle, evaded another group of VC, and finally helped in a successful rescue attempt although wounded. His wounds required that he be medevacuated to the Clark AB Hospital, from which he called the school 23 hours and 10 minutes after leaving class.[55/] He had put into use the training received in the course and wanted to let the instructors know how much it had helped him.

Many of the aforementioned sentiments were echoed in the official debriefs, such as the following comments by recovered crewmembers:[56]

> *. . . I did a lot of things right. I don't know if I would have done them correctly had I not thought about them. I thought a long time ago that I'd probably be pretty panicky in this situation and was almost certain I'd be shot down sometime during this war. I just wanted to be prepared when it happened. The main point that most guys bring out when they come back is that they weren't prepared. I kept beating down panic so many times I couldn't believe it. I would undergo a moment of panic and talk it down so I knew what would have to be done first. Up in the air I was real calm. I knew how to use the equipment, and I knew what to do. In essence, the survival school in the Philippines was the most important thing to me.*

His Aircraft Commander said:[57]

> *. . . A lot of the things I did, I did automatically because I'd gone over them so many times. I knew what the proper egress procedures and sitting positions were. I knew what to do with my equipment when I was coming down in my chute. I think the training has been really quite adequate. In fact, it has been outstanding. The equipment I had with me worked real well.*

Another pilot, whose RF-4C went down over eastern Laos, commented upon his return:[58]

> *. . . I believe, without a shadow of a doubt, that an evader's greatest enemy is panic. On several occasions, I had to stop and remind myself to slow down and think. I was never concerned with the jungle because it looked just like the PJSS "camp grounds." My only concern was being captured before rescue could get to us. This*

had been expected because of survival and E & E lectures. PJSS is just great; it could have been the difference.

His navigator, rescued with him, had the following observations about his experience:[59]

. . . Ejection, parachute, and equipment training were completely adequate and provided me with enough knowledge to get the job done. . . . The Clark training is an absolute must. Their most valuable lesson was that fear must be conquered in a jungle survival situation, and that point could have very well made the difference between being deeply concerned about the situation and suffering from sheer panic.

Among the classroom displays at the Jungle Survival School is the "Wall of Fame," list of the names of JSS graduates who were downed in Southeast Asia and subsequently recovered. Many of the names have small markers after them, denoting that these men were downed twice and twice recovered. As of 31 December 1971 the board listed 593 returned graduates.[60]

CHAPTER III

SOME OF THE EVADERS

Among the First

Soon after the Rolling Thunder bombing of North Vietnam began, in early 1965, the USAF and USN began losing aircraft to intense ground fire over that country. On 2 March 1965, during a strike against the Xom Bang Munitions Storage Area (1707N/10645E) three F-105Ds from the 67th Tactical Fighter Squadron were hit and their pilots forced to eject. One pilot nursed his aircraft back across the Mekong River and got out over Thailand; the second had his controls freeze up halfway between Tchepone, Laos, and the Mekong and had to eject at that point. Fortunately, he landed in friendly territory, where Laotian troops assisted in his recovery.[61] The third pilot attempted to make it out to sea, but smoke in the cockpit, compressor stalls, and loss of power caused him to "punch out" only three miles from the target.[62] After a ten minute descent he landed in a jungled area with trees fifty feet high. The pilot slipped the parachute in order to land on the opposite side of a ridgeline from the target. The narrative of the pilot, Captain Robert V. Baird, described the landing and the events immediately following.[63]

> *...After landing in the tree, my right leg was suspended over my head by the survival kit lanyard. The kit had hung up by the inflatable dinghy above me. I opened the G-suit survival knife with my teeth (one hand was holding onto the tree) and cut the lanyard. The kit fell below me but did not go all the way to the ground. This I found out only after getting to the ground myself and seeing the kit twenty-five feet above me. I climbed down by*

switching to a tree that had vines around the trunk which I could hold onto.

After arriving on the ground, I ran down a stream about three feet wide until I came to a creek I had been aiming for during my descent. Upon reaching the creek, I changed my .38 caliber bullets to tracers and started planning how to evade if the chopper didn't show up. I figured that the enemy would have to come up the stream to get me as the undergrowth was too thick to penetrate. It also appeared it would take them two hours and that I would have time to hide across the creek.

Captain Baird was capped by a succession of aircraft including F-105s, F-100s, B-57s, and an HU-16 amphibian until, a few hours later, two A-1Es flew over him. He fired two tracers past the left wing of the A-1Es and two more past the HH-43 helicopter which flew just behind them. The helicopter made one circle and picked him up out of the middle of the stream. The pickup was made from the stream because the underbrush on each side would have prevented the horsecollar from reaching the survivor.[64/]

In retrospect, it might be easy to find faults in the pilot's evasion techniques, but it must be remembered that crewmembers had not received jungle training, and that equipment, evasion techniques, and pickup tactics were primitive compared to those of six years later. Captain Baird climbed down the tree (later proved to be extremely dangerous), but the Personnel Lowering Device was not yet being carried. He ran down the stream, which other recoverees later confirmed was one of the easiest ways to be surprised by the enemy, and he fired tracers off the wing of the A-1s for visual identification. In his case this was

effective, but as he himself cautioned, if fired too close to a searching aircraft, the pilot might assume he was drawing hostile fire.[65]

The differences in SAR techniques and equipment, between early 1965 and late 1971, were shown in the narrative. The short-range, slow HH-43, although kept on for local base recovery, was succeeded by CH-3Cs and HH-3Es by December 1965, for long range penetration.[66] These "Jolly Greens" were augmented in September 1967 by the even bigger and faster HH-53Bs, which allowed even deeper and higher elevation pickups.[67] Another breakthrough in response time and penetration distance came with the advent of aerial refueling of the HH-3E by the HC-130. This allowed for the helicopters to fly in preselected orbits near areas of high strike activity, to provide minimum reaction time in the event an aircraft was downed.[68] When the HH-3E arrived, it brought with it the forest penetrator, a piece of equipment which greatly alleviated the problems associated with getting a sling down through the jungle canopy and undergrowth.[69] Made of steel, pointed, with three folding seats and a restraining strap, at the end of a 240 foot hoist cable, the penetrator alone effected many escapes from hazardous situations.

Constrasts and Similarities

Nothing showed the diversity of various evasion accounts as did the contrasts between the individual experiences of the survivors; and nothing underscored the value of training, planning, will-to-survive, and a little bit of luck, as did a few amazingly similar instances. Some were relatively uneventful recovery operations (except to the individual

who went through the trauma of finding himself suddenly blasted out of a cool, comfortable, familiar cockpit into a violent, alien, painful, and unknown world). On the "uneventful" ones, the SAR Task Force (SARTF) simply moved in and extracted the survivor without the annoyances of hostile fire, adverse weather, or poor communications to plague them. Others were action packed adventures, capable of being made into a moving picture script where the "good guys and the bad guys" took turns at winning and losing, with the "good guys" eventually emerging victorious. It was certainly not all humorous; tragedy overshadowed some of the most successful of recovery efforts.

Shock was almost invariably present, compounding dizziness, panic, and an incredible thirst with an already undesirable situation. The impact of this state of shock was almost incomprehensible to those who had not experienced it. It was more easily visualized when one could put himself into the plight of a C-130 navigator (on Blindbat 13, a flareship) over Laos, who unexpectedly found his parachute deployed through an open door. He rapidly followed it into the slipstream, dropping in a black sky over an undetermined position at an uncertain altitude over unknown terrain. To complicate matters, his parachute was streaming and he could never get it fully open prior to impact with the ground. His back was injured painfully when he hit the ground, and he soon found out that searchers, speaking in an unrecognized language, came within 75 feet of his position. He conquered his shock and assisted a successful recovery the next morning.[70/]

His situation could be likened to that of Lt. Roger Busico, 31st TFW, who ejected at treetop level from an uncontrollable, flaming F-100 in midsummer, 1969. In his words:[71]

> *...After releasing the ordnance I started to pull out and the aircraft started to come up. Then the stick froze and I couldn't move it back any further. The plane struck a tree on the top of the hill and caught fire. I became disoriented after striking the tree and didn't know if I was upside down or right side up. I did know that I was going to crash and that I had to eject.*
>
> *...When the canopy separated, the floor of the cockpit turned bright orange. My wingman later told me that the aircraft looked like a large comet out of which I came shooting.*

The Lieutenant saw that he was going to land in the trees, and tried to assume the tree-landing position but did not have time before he went through the trees with his parachute still not completely deployed. After striking the base of one of the trees, he sat up to take stock. His survival vest pockets were melted and all his gear except the radios was gone; the radios had been retained only by the zippers. His G-suit legs were gone from the knees down, and his flying suit sleeves were in tatters. One arm was badly burned, and he felt that his face had also been burned in the ejection. In his words:[72]

> *...I was in shock, but it wasn't so bad that I couldn't handle myself or didn't know what was going on...I drank a can of water and left the rest of the equipment in the kit.*

Despite faulty radio communications, Lt. Busico made contact with a rescue helicopter by using his day smoke flares and was successfully recovered and flown to the Phan Thiet hospital for treatment of his burns.[73]

In two events, similar in effect but contrasting in details, an RF-4C navigator and an F-105 pilot went through the ejection-downed-recovered experience within a two week period in March-April, 1969. On 20 March, 1st Lt. Ronald D. Stafford, of the 388th TFW, was hit by ground fire on his second attempt at a Bullpup missile launch. Suddenly his aircraft was upside down, and then in a spin.[74]

Lt. Stafford described the situation as follows:[75]

> *...I continued around one spin in the revolution and made one transmission: "I'm hit; I'm in a spin." I could see the ground coming up at me. I knew I had no control over the aircraft. I proceeded to punch out.*
>
> *...I ejected with the mask on, the visor down and my head all the way back. There was very little turbulence or windblast. Almost immediately I felt the "butt-snapper" separate, and I was in my chute. All systems worked automatically.*
>
> *...I could see huts below me and to my left. I counted ten in all. At this time, I think I picked up some automatic weapons fire from the ground. There weren't any tracers but something was whizzing past. I cut the four lines and started experimenting in what direction I could direct the chute.*
>
> *...I continued working with my parachute risers and slipped toward a ridge above the huts. As I got closer to the trees I put on my mask, lowered my visor, and prepared for a tree landing. I raised my arms and put my face into the crook of my right arm.*

My knees were bent; my seat pack wasn't deployed. I possibly could have protected myself better from some scratches if I'd deployed my LPUs.

...I hit the tree canopy, which broke my fall somewhat. I continued down and hit the ground fairly hard. I ended up sliding down the hill face forward; when I finally stopped, it was a struggle to sit up because I was on a steep hill. I sat up and found the beeper, turned it off and got out my radio. I checked to see if the beeper was transmitting and didn't get anything. I then started transmitting, "Mayday, Mayday."

...I continued to talk with Detroit 02, Misty 31, and Spad 01. During this time I moved uphill ten to twenty yards and some of my transmissions were being cut off by the hills around me. I took a bearing to the southwest on two AAA pieces and told Misty 31 that they were about two miles from my position.

Lt. Stafford continued to work with the SAR forces until the Jolly Greens arrived to pick him up. After some momentary confusion caused by not knowing which was the High Jolly and which was the Low, he directed them over his position and was spotted. He continued:[76/]

...They were right over me and I could see the penetrator coming down. I was thinking about letting the penetrator touch the ground first, but grabbed it after it hit the trees to prevent it from sliding down the steep slope. I got the strap around me, lowered two seats, and gave them the "thumbs up" to start hauling me in. About half way up, the chopper began to move out of the area. I reminded myself to let the PJ pull me in, and not try and help.

Lt. Stafford's final observations on his experience summed up much of what he had done well:[77/]

My URT-10 radio was tremendous. When the SAR force got close to me I had great communication...I have no recommendations to make. I think it is the individual's

choice whether or not to deploy the seat kit when coming in for a tree landing. I happened to hang onto mine. I decided a long time ago that I was not going to deploy the kit because I didn't want to have the life raft catch in the trees and having me hung upside-down in the trees.

A scant two weeks later, the RF-4C backseater began his experience in much the same way (this one over South Vietnam, however) and ended it in a successful recovery. In the interim period, a momentary lapse created a few uncomfortable moments, until he assessed his situation and determined how to get out of it. From that moment on, he did an excellent job in contributing to one of the rare night recoveries in SEA records. The Captain described part of his experiences as follows:[78]

...[After the aircraft commander ordered him to eject] I ejected when the altimeter read 7,000 feet. I was disoriented due to the heavy weather, but I think the aircraft was right side up. I assumed the aircraft was right side up. I took the bailout position...my helmet was secure and the visor was down...I used the primary system.

I remember my head being thrown back by the windblast. The visor shattered and tore away from the helmet. I was still disoriented because I was tumbling forward and in the clouds. I don't recall seat separation. The first thing I remembered to do after ejection was to separate from the seat but it was already gone. That's when I felt the opening shock of the chute. The shock was moderate. I couldn't see the [chute] canopy because I was in the clouds. I could barely make out the ground until I was about 1,000 feet above it. I deployed the seat kit; almost immediately the oscillation stopped. [Author's note: More frequently, the opposite appeared to be the case; the parachute oscillations increased upon seat kit deployment.]

...The descent didn't take long. I could see I was going to land in the trees so I tucked my head and covered my face with my arms. I drifted slightly and the survival kit caught in the tops of the trees. The chute pulled me from a vertical to a horizontal position. The chute snared itself and I was hung by the chute and the survival kit just as if I were in a hammock...I made sure the chute could support my weight before I released the kit. I lowered myself to the ground using the tree lowering device (PLD)... That piece of equipment really came in handy. Without it I would have been stuck up in the trees. I had to leave the seat kit up there in order to get down.

The Captain bailed out late in the afternoon, and it was dark before the Pedro (HH-43) arrived on the scene. By voice vector and strobe light, helicopter-positioning by its sound, he brought the helicopter in to his position. In a lightly contested area, the Pedro risked using his landing lights, saw the survivor, and dropped the penetrator to extract him.[79/]

Boxer 22 Bravo and Wolf 06 Alpha

Two of the most spectacular evasions and recoveries in the SEA conflict were so similar that they gave the observer a head-shaking feeling of deja vu - "I feel that I've been here before." They also illustrated the sound evasion and SAR principles developed over the period of conflict. Both crewmembers were shot down near Ban Phanop, a karst-studded, crater-pocked valley about ten miles south of Mu Gia Pass, one of the primary infiltration routes from North Vietnam into Laos. (See Project CHECO report, "Rescue at Ban Phanop.")

In the first incident, Boxer 22, an F-4C from Cam Ranh Bay Air Base, SVN, took crippling antiaircraft hits at the bottom of its dive run, and both pilot and navigator had to eject immediately. The navigator, Lt. Woodrow Bergeron, later recalled:[80/]

> *We rolled in from 17,000 feet, jinking as we came in. We pickled (dropped the ordnance) at about 5,000 feet, and then, "Boom," we got hit and the plane lurched at a steep angle as we were bringing the nose up. The nose still wasn't coming up all the way, so I got into position for an ejection.*
>
> *I had good body position and I was sure my visor was down. My helmet was fastened. I didn't feel any tumbling, but the windblast tore my helmet off, cutting my nose. Seat separation was automatic. I could steer my chute a bit, and I could see a 12.7mm weapon firing at me from the east. I could also see a man on the ground. I steered for a ten foot by ten foot clearing the last thirty feet to the ground. I didn't deploy my seatpack because I didn't want to give the gunner a better target.*

Lieutenant Bergeron hit the ground running, on one side of the Nam Ngo River; his pilot landed on the other side. It was the morning of 5 December 1969, and Lt. Bergeron was to face the most difficult 48 hours of his life.[81/]

The valley was alive with enemy guns, from small arms through machine guns to 37mm and 57mm antiaircraft guns (AAA). Most of the small arms were on the west side of the river, where the pilot had come down, but the AAA was in the karst on the east side about 300 meters from the navigator. When the A-1E "Sandy's" and the Jolly Greens arrived they were given a bruising welcome by these guns. The Lieutenant and his

pilot were both in touch with the SARTF throughout the day, and although six pickup attemptes were made before darkness, all six were driven off by the gunfire. At 1400 hours, the Pararescue Jumper (PJ) aboard one of the Jolly Greens was wounded critically; he died enroute to Nakhon Phanom. Later in the afternoon another helicopter came close to the pilot's position, but took a hit in the rotor blades and had to egress.[82/]

When the last rescue attempt failed, at 1730 hours, the On-Scene Commander, Sandy 01, notified the downed airmen that it was getting too dark for ccntinued operations that day and that they would return at first light in the morning. Lieutenant Bergeron stayed in a clump of bamboo where he had hidden, and he and the pilot kept in radio contact through the night. Neither slept.[83/]

At 0600 in the morning, the SAR Task Force returned to the area, considerably bulwarked with additional strike aircraft. Along with the HC-130 "King" Airborne Mission Commander (AMC), were four Jolly Greens, 12 A-1s, and a constantly cycling number of jets. The SAR force made contact with Lt. Bergeron but not with the pilot, and then went to work sanitizing the area with bombs and CBU (Cluster Bomb Units). An hour later the navigator told the Sandy that he had just heard excited voices across the river, followed by a long burst of automatic weapons fire and a scream from the pilot.[84/]

Throughout the day the Task Force saturated the area with bombs, rockets, bullets, and CBU. After it was suggested that the enemy

might well be using the downed survivor as "bait" for a flak trap, the SARTF laid in white phosphorus smoke bombs and incendiary CBU-22s, for a protective screen, and augmented the screen with riot control agent (RCA) CBUs to lower the enemy gunners' effectiveness. Paveway (laser guided bombs), Bullpup missiles, and Walleyes (electro-optically guided bombs) struck the gun emplacements all day, while numerous attempts were made to get helicopters in to the survivor. He scrambled up a sheer rock wall to get to one of them hovering beyond the bank, but when he got to just about six feet of it, it was forced out of the area by groundfire.[85/]

The SAR effort was again forced to stop operations for the day when darkness once more closed in. The last helicopter approach was made too late for Lt. Bergeron to return to his bamboo clump. He ran instead to the roots of a nearby tree and began to dig in under them. This probably saved his life, for about 15 minutes after nightfall, two enemy soldiers approached his former hiding place and, after throwing an unexploded tear-gas cannister into the bamboo clump, emptied a clip of automatic weapons fire into it.[86/]

After they left, Lt. Bergeron tried to swim the river but found it too difficult. Instead he took cover under a riverbank bush for the night. He later said:[87/]

> *During the night I began to hallucinate. I envisioned two members of my squadron were with me, discussing my plans of action. I was subject to sporadic rounds of*

mortar fire from time to time, but none of them came near me. The only time I became seriously concerned was at dawn. I knew the enemy knew I was hiding out somewhere on the bank of the river and it was just a matter of time before they would find me. Thank God, however, the Sandies were there early on the third day.

The first rescue attempt on the third morning was made just before nine o'clock. The area was so saturated with smoke, however, that the Jolly Green could not see. He had to exit. Another three hours of sanitizing the area ensued, with a Paveway finally silencing the enemy's biggest gun, a 57mm AAA piece.[88/]

At 1140 the task force was readied for another attempt. With ten A-1s on one side of the river, and 12 on the other forming a protective ring around Bergeron, the helicopter made a dash for his position. The Lieutenant ran out into the river, waving his white-border evasion and escape chart to identify himself. The Jolly Green went past him, made a 360 degree turn to come back, and lowered the penetrator. They hoisted him aboard, then made a rapid exit from the scene. In this attempt, there was no appreciable gunfire; as one member of the rescue party commented, "They were all either dead or had given up."[89/]

The ride back to Nakhon Phanom was uneventful and, once there, Lt. Bergeron had a chance to meet many of the people who had worked so hard in his behalf for three days and two nights. A total of 336 sorties had been flown in the operation.[90/] (Photo, following page.)

Wolf 06, an F-4D, took off from Udorn RTAFB in late afternoon of 19 March 1970, for a visual reconnaissance mission over Laos. The mission also served to orient the navigator, a new man in-theater, on the prominent topographical features of the area. The aircraft commander, Captain Richard Rash, wanted to point out areas where they might expect heavy gunfire along the route structure, and to brief the back-seater on the characteristics of each type of weaponry he might encounter.[91/]

The Captain described what happened:[92/]

I started to let down again as we approached Ban Phanop. As we reached the western mouth we were at about 7,000 feet. The Lieutenant made the comment that this was Boxer 22 country. I replied, "Yes, it's the most God forsaken place in the world." As we crossed Ban Phanop I showed him the supply trails along the road, the bulldozer stall, and several other items of interest. Our altitude had gotten down to about 5,500 feet to 6,500 feet. As we were going toward Mu Gia, two 37mm guns started firing at us from our left. They were about six-level gunners, not very accurate, but I thought it would be a good chance to show the Lieutenant what gunfire looks like so I pulled up sharply into a left turn to keep them in sight and break into the tracers. By this time it was getting dark and the tracers were clearly visible.

I told him to follow the tracers back to the ground to locate the revetments. One of the guns fired another round and he said, "Roger, I have the revetments." At this time I followed my normal procedure of starting to break in the other direction in case someone was firing from my blind side. As I started to roll the airplane to the right I saw a huge red fireball approaching from the right that seemed to be about ten feet from the airplane. In my opinion this was a 57mm round because I didn't see any other

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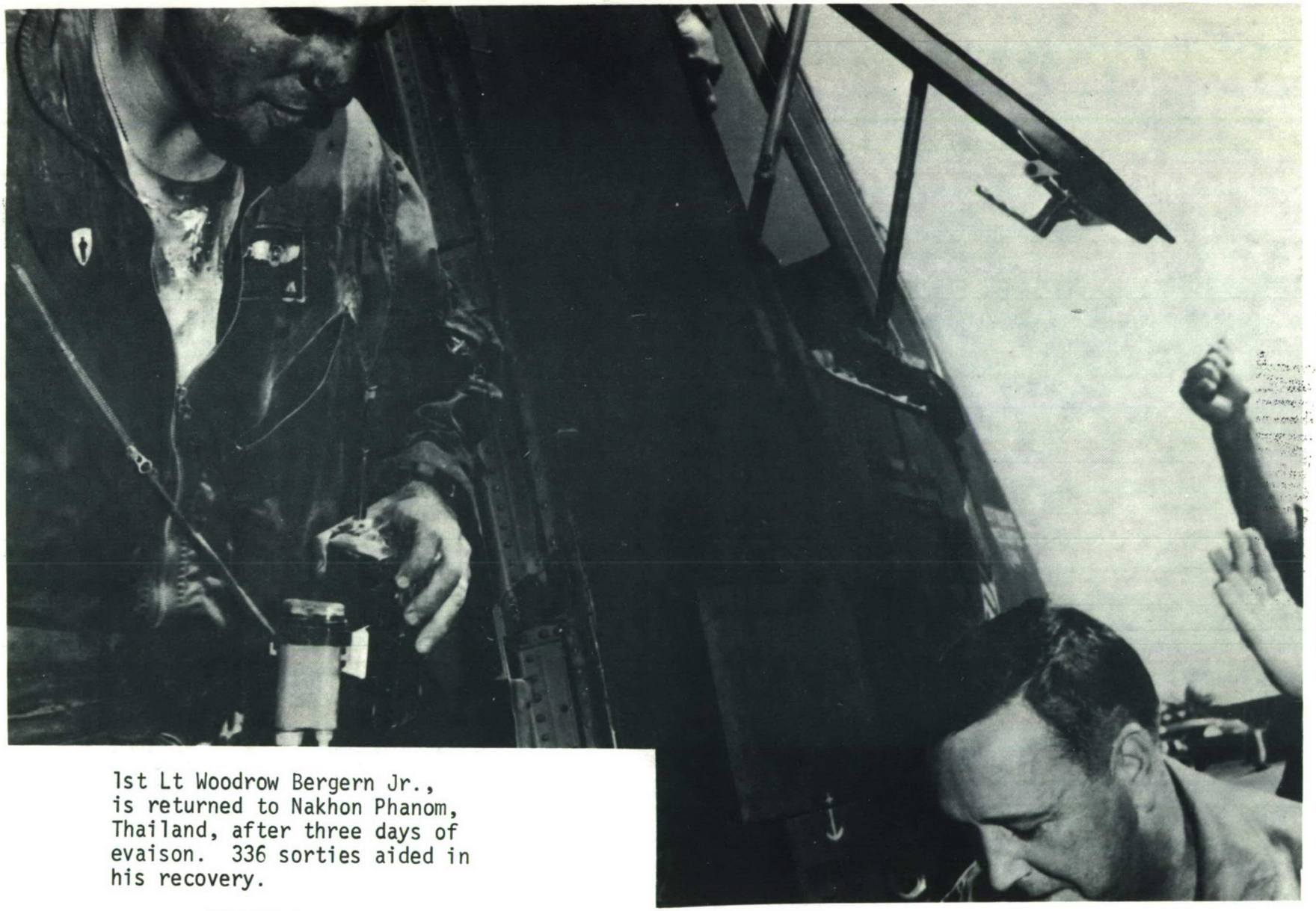


1st Lt Woodrow Bergern Jr., is returned to Nakhon Phanom, Thailand, after three days of evaison. 336 sorties aided in his recovery.

FIGURE 8

UNCLASSIFIED

tracers and a 37mm usually has three or four tracers per string. The size of the blast and the stopping power also led me to believe it was a 57mm. When I saw the fireball, I knew we were hit. I heard the backseater scream, "We're hit."

The aircraft instantly burst into flame and plunged abruptly into a "high negative G" dive or spin. Under the adverse "G" conditions, it was difficult to get out, but the pilot and navigator managed to eject at about 5,000 feet. The time was approximately 1825 local time. Captain Rash recounted:[93/]

The next thing I knew I was in my chute. I lost my helmet on ejection. There was no chance to select an emergency heading because we only had about three or four seconds between the time we were hit and when we ejected...I don't remember the backseater ejecting or my leaving the airplane. I just remember being in my chute.

I deployed my seatpack and pulled my survival radio out. I began to transmit on Guard that I was down in Ban Phanop valley. I noticed at this time that the Lieutenant was also on his radio. Before deploying the seatkit I looked around the area in which I would be landing to find out if I wanted to deploy it or not. Since I was apparently going to land in an open field, I deployed it.

Upon contact with the ground, Captain Rash departed the area quickly because he heard small arms fire and numerous enemy voices around him. During the awkward ejection he had suffered a severe bruise on his foot and a muscle strain in his back, as well as first and second degree burns over his face, neck, and lower arms. He nonetheless wanted to put immediate distance between him and the enemy. He waded a shallow river, which then put the stream between him and his

backseater. At one time he ran through a thicket where - in his words - "I could have hidden, but all I could think of was the Boxer 22 report, where the enemy was all around him and seemed to know where he was, and shot all through the area he was in."

The Captain eventually reached the base of the karst and found a cave-like indentation where he hid, about 20 feet up the face of it. He had been evading for approximately fifteen minutes. Pain and exhaustion, at this point, made him pass out. When he awakened, he heard the navigator talking on the survival radio to Candlestick 42, a FAC/Flare C-123. Captain Rash also came up on the radio to let them know he was alive, and to try to give them his location. He was losing fluid from his burns and shock, and later credited his two water bottles with giving him the strength and time to survive his coming ordeal. Speaking about the remainder of the first night, he said:[94/]

> *Enemy activity was astonishing. The minute we were down the enemy started bringing in guns all around our position. They had 37mm, 23mm, ZPU, and small arms. It was obvious what they were doing and it made me furious. They had set their pattern in a crossfire, knowing that the SAR effort would begin in the morning. They fired about 1,200 rounds throughout the evening to make sure their crossfire pattern would cover the area where the Jolly Greens or Sandies would be coming in. The first night was spent to the tempo of many rounds of triple-A going off all around me.*

There was little doubt in Captain Rash's mind that he was down in "Boxer Country." The enemy employed precisely the "flak-trap" tactics they had, using Lt. Bergeron as bait, three months earlier.

On 20 March, the first-light SAR effort began, and from that point on, the F-4 pilot received constant fighter cover, bombing and strafing repeatedly in attempts to soften up the enemy defenses. It was not easy. Enemy AAA was extremely heavy, and used the tactic of waiting until the aircraft were pulling off their runs, and then "backstabbing" as the fighters passed them. Only four Jolly Green attempts could be made to rescue the pilot and navigator that day because of the intense gunfire, three of which were for the navigator because of his more open position. All failed; the helicopters took numerous hits and had to leave the area. With evening approaching, it was apparent to Captain Rash that the SARTF would have to break off further attempts for the night. He said:[95/]

> *After the attempt to get the Lieutenant out failed, it began to get dark and I knew they would soon have to close down the SAR effort for that day. As they were talking about closing down, I heard the Lieutenant come on the air quietly and say he had bad guys all around him, closing in with small arms and AK-47s. He said they seemed to know right where he was. About two minutes later he keyed his mike but didn't say anything. I heard bad guy voices, it sounded like they had their mouths right on the mike. I heard him say, "Wait," and then the mike went dead. I then heard 15 to 20 shots fired in the area he was in...That terminated the SAR effort for that day. The Sandies told me to "hang tough" and they would be back in the morning. I was at my weakest point right then, both mentally and physically. My final comment to them was, "You don't really believe that, do you?" I got no response to that.*

The night passed rather quickly and quietly for Captain Rash, since the enemy already had their AAA zeroed in, and apparently did

not feel they had to change it. He heard dogs barking during the night, and thought for awhile they were tracking him, but since they did not approach his position, he figured they were merely dogs from the local villages. The next morning the SAR effort resumed. They immediately pinpointed his position and again began the sanitizing process. The Captain's narrative said:[96/]

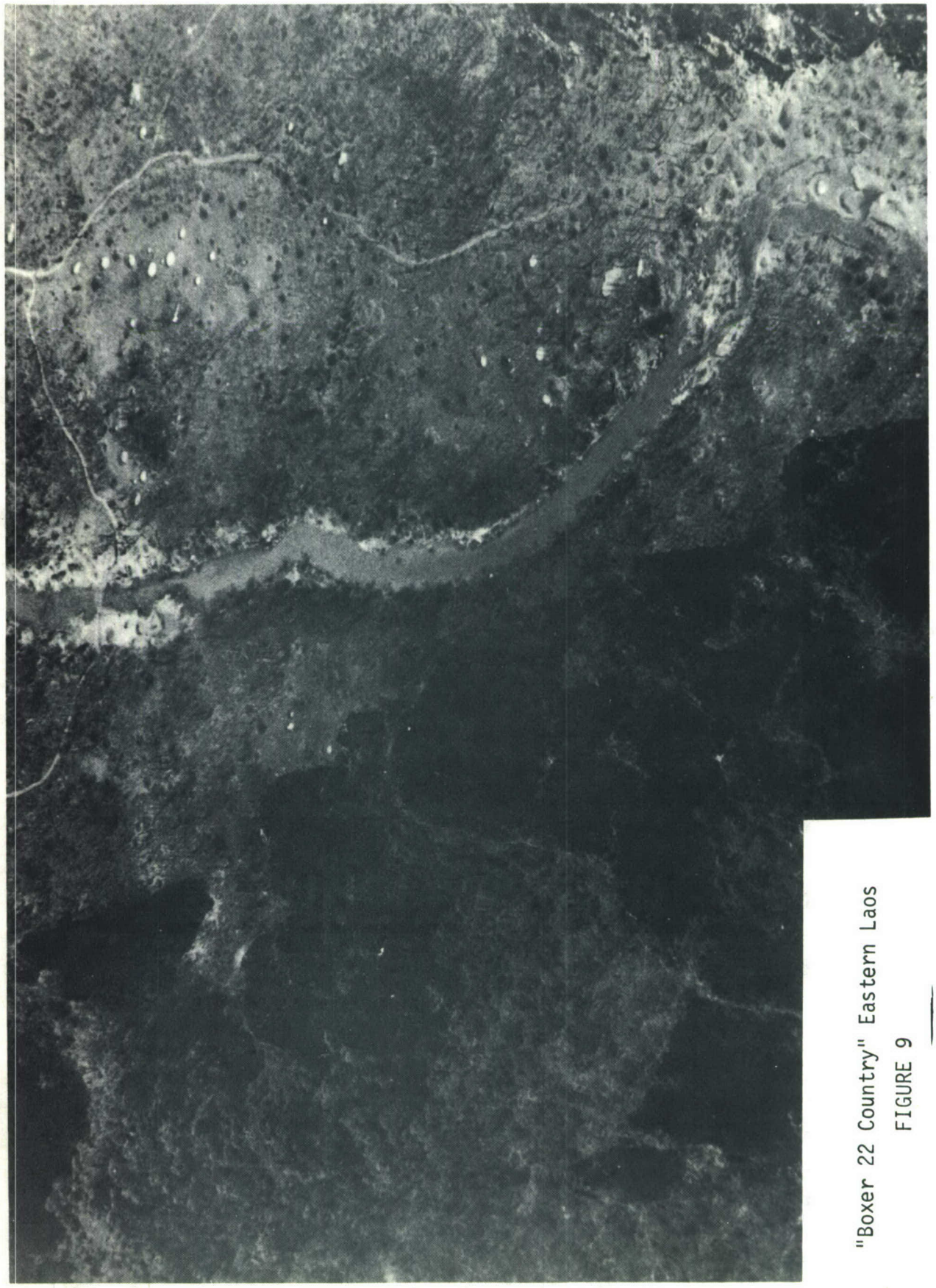
> *They started out with the "Papa Whiskies" (Paveways), CBUs, everything else like they did the previous day. They just pounded the area to soften it up. They'd found out the previous day that the karst formation where I was had four or five heavy guns sitting right on top of it. On this day they brought in the "Papa Whiskies" and knocked those positions out. I think Sandy said they were 23mm gun emplacements.*

The first helicopter to come in overshot Rash and went about 150 meters too far, where it ran into a nest of machine guns and had to dash out of the area. After two and a half more hours of softening up, the SAR forces made another try, this time from a different direction. To the Captain, it was a thing of beauty:[97/]

> *The scene was beautiful as they came in. The Sandies had a daisy chain set up to where they were dropping CBUs and strafing right ahead of the Jolly Green as he came in. They were dropping "Apeman" (RCA) too. There was a wall of "Apeman", smoke, dust, and bomb bursts on either side of the Jolly Green as he came in.*

Captain Rash vectored the helicopter in to the point where the pilot spotted his flare, and from that point on the rescue went smoothly. He and Lieutenant Bergeron had come back from "Boxer 22 Country" under

almost identical circumstances. Both had been shot down over Ban Phanop valley. Both had to eject within seconds of being hit. Each was separated by a river from his compatriot (See photo, following page). Each had heard his fellow flyer probably killed. In each case, the enemy used the survivors as flak bait. On both occasions, the Jolly Greens had to abort several attempts at rescue because of the intense ground fire. Both times the SARTF used laser guided bombs to take out the heavy guns, and both times set up a wall of smoke, bombs, dust, and tear gas on each side of the helicopter on the final, and successful, rescue attempt. Both crewmen had spent parts of three days and all of two nights in the valley.



"Boxer 22 Country" Eastern Laos
FIGURE 9

CHAPTER IV

A FEW OF THE ESCAPES

There were very few escapes successfully executed in Southeast Asia, and the reasons were manifold. The escaper, unless of Oriental extraction himself, had no chance of "blending" into the populace. This meant that he had to avoid human habitats and lines of communication for, while indigenous personnel might be friendly, he usually had no way of being certain. In turn, this could mean the escaper would be faced with an extended survival situation under the worst conditions; a fire could give him away, so most of his food was eaten raw; the risk of "appropriating" food from the local people would normally be too great; and finally, the enemy knew the territory while the escaper did not.

There were escapes, to be sure. Not all of them were downed aircrew members. Army Major James N. "Nick" Rowe spent more time in captivity - five years and two months - before escaping than any other in the history of the war to date. Captured when his Special Forces camp was overrun on 29 October 1963, Rowe spent his next five years in the "No-K Corral", a compound in the swampy, coastal area of the Delta, under a canopy of mango trees. He made one attempt at escape but was recaptured. Then, under cover of a Cobra gunship attack, he broke from his guard and ran to a hovering helicopter, where he was hoisted aboard and returned to Saigon. The date was 31 December 1968.[98/]

Staff Sergeant Jasper Page, USAF, and two friends, had flown to the resort area of Vung Tau on 30 October 1965 for a day of recreation and swimming. The following day they found that the helicopter would not return for them, so they borrowed a car from some Vietnamese friends, explaining that they would be charged with being AWOL if they did not return to Saigon on time. About halfway back, on the supposedly secure road, they were stopped by a band of Viet Cong and apprehended. In an encampment three days later, SSgt Page and one friend, who had been tied together, worked their bonds free. Each was to knock out a guard, take their guns, and run to the west. When the time came, Page knocked out his guard and grabbed a carbine. His friend failed in his attempt, and tried to flee, at which time Page raised the rifle and tried to shoot the other guard. The rifle malfunctioned, however, and since the other guard was too far away for Page to engage physically, he was forced to run. Behind him he heard several shots and screams, but the VC were unable to recapture Sgt Page. He showed up at the Tam An Special Forces Camp the following morning, 4 November 1965.[99/]

Klusman

The first record of a U.S. airman being downed over enemy territory, captured, escaped, and recovered, belonged to Navy Lieutenant Charles F. Klusman. The date was 6 June 1964.[100/] Flying a photo reconnaissance mission over Route 7, in Laos, Lt. Klusman found it necessary to eject from his RF-8A. Upon reaching the ground, he was captured by the Pathet Lao. He was interned in a PW camp for nearly three months before he

made good his escape.[101]

A few months after his capture, Klusman was approached by a Laotian named Boun, who appeared quite friendly, and who proposed an escape plan. Although the man appeared sincere, Klusman cautiously acted casual about the affair. For the next few days he watched the man carefully but detected nothing out of place in his behavior. He found out that Boun was a Pathet Lao, imprisoned for political reasons. Finally Klusman decided to take him up on it.[102]

In probing Boun for details, Klusman discovered that Boun had no clear-cut plan, but he did have some friends who would like to join them in the escape. One of these friends was a man named Kham, who spoke better English than Boun. Among them, they worked out the details. According to the 7th AF Weekly Air Intelligence Summary:[103]

> *After much discussion, the prisoners set 5 September as the date for their escape. By that time, the rainy season would have begun and would help obliterate their trail and provide protective noise; also, the moon would be dark. There were many troops toward the south and southeast, but fewer toward the north and northwest. The general plan was for them to go under the wire fence and then north about 15 kilometers to friendly forces.*

They began to watch the guards closely to become familiar with their routine; meanwhile, Klusman was establishing a routine of his own, to lull the guards into a false sense of security. He placed the tennis shoes they had given him in a certain place by his bed each night, and positioned the lantern in the identical spot when he went to sleep. During

daylight he wore the tennis shoes constantly, keeping his boots hidden.[104/]

They decided to make the break in late August, earlier than previously planned. Light rains had moistened the earth, which would make for quiet walking, and the moon was rising later each night. On 27 August they decided to go, only to discover that extra guards had been posted. Fortunately, a few hours later the extra guards departed, and the group began the planned routine. Klusman carefully placed his tennis shoes in the accustomed spot along with the lantern. Then, while two of the escapers engaged the guard in conversation, Klusman made up the bed to make it appear that someone was sleeping in it. He then retrieved his boots and slipped out. Four of them worked their way out through the wire. The night was still dark, the ground was moist, and the cowbells on several grazing water buffalo helped to cover any noise they might make. Once out, and screened from view of the camp by a small hill, they decided that Klusman and two others would go on ahead, while the fourth would wait for the remaining two. Heading northwest, they made contact with friendly forces on 28 August 1965.

Dengler

Perhaps the most publicized escape was that of Lieutenant Dieter Dengler. His A-1 shot down over Laos on 2 February 1966, Dengler crash-landed it, was captured, escaped, recaptured, and imprisoned until approximately 29 June 1966, when he, and others, stole some rifles, killed most of their guards, and melted into the jungle. In a 21 day saga of sheer determination, Dengler saw his partner killed, narrowly

evaded recapture, was forced to eat raw snails to survive, suffered the frustration of watching aircraft after aircraft go over him without spotting him, and trekking untold miles through the jungle. With his last remaining strength, he tore the panels of a flare parachute he'd found, to make a crude "SOS" in a rocky clearing. The job took him two hours.[105/]

On the 22nd day, an Air Force Skyraider finally saw him, circled while Dengler tried to wave, and called for a SAR effort. A helicopter arrived overhead about 1100 hours in the morning, dropped Dengler a rescue harness and lifted him out to return to friendly hands. At the time of his recovery, Dengler's weight had dropped to 98 pounds.[106/] (Recommended reading: "The Dengler Debrief," SERE, Fleet Intelligence Center, Pacific, 5 Oct 66.)

Prendergast

Few escape stories of the war packed as much drama into so short a time frame as did that of Lt JG Frank S. Prendergast. On the afternoon of 9 March 1967, Prendergast and his aircraft commander launched their RA-5C from the USS Kittyhawk in the Gulf of Tonkin. Their mission was that of photo reconnaissance of North Vietnam, but they had no sooner "coasted in" when their aircraft was hit, went out of control, and was enveloped in flames. Within seconds Prendergast and the pilot left their airplane in an extremely low level ejection.[107/]

His parachute had barely opened, he swung once and hit the water in a prone position, about 100 yards from the North Vietnamese shore and

about 100 yards from the crashed aircraft. He immediately inflated his life preserver, then sat up to find that he was in water about two feet deep. Prendergast freed himself of his parachute and seat, and began to wade toward the burning wreckage to see if he could determine the fate of his skipper.[108/]

When Prendergast neared the aircraft, however, he saw a group of North Vietnamese Militia come down to the shore. They began shouting, waving, and shooting at him although, he recalled later, they didn't seem to intend to hit him at that time. He turned and ran back out into the water, trying to get to a sandbar about 400 yards from shore, with the Militia running out after him. Prendergast fired his .38 pistol (with four tracer rounds in it) at them, while they, in turn, formed a "V" to cut him off and fired in front of him to slow him down.[109/]

Eventually they encircled him and, realizing that further attempts to evade them were useless, Prendergast raised his hands. The apparent leader came up to him, took his pistol away from him, and began to escort him back toward shore, with most of the group knocking him down with gun butts and prodding him with the barrels.[110/]

Meanwhile, the SAR Task Force was on the way, called by Prendergast's wingman. Jets appeared first and began strafing in the water between the group and shore. The militia appeared to pay little attention to the jets, but when the A-1 Spads appeared, they began to get apprehensive. As the Spads rolled in for their strafing runs, the group, almost to a

man, ducked under water until the Skyraiders roared over, and many broke for shore on a run between passes. Finally Prendergast realized he was left with only two captors near him, the leader with Prendergast's pistol, and another guard with a rifle.[111]

The leader waded about three to four feet away with the pistol always pointed at Prendergast, with the other man slightly further. Prendergast watched them with interest. He noticed that, when the A-1s rolled in, the man with the rifle would duck under the water. The leader did not duck under, but was decidedly apprehensive, stealing quick glances at the incoming aircraft. Both would stop wading during the attacks.[112]

Prendergast knew there would never be a better time to make a break for it. He waited until the next Spads rolled in, then as the rifleman ducked under the surface and the leader took his eyes off him, Prendergast reached inside his survival vest and pulled out a .22 caliber automatic he carried; they had not searched him. The leader caught the move and turned to fire at the airman, but the .38 simply clicked on empty chambers. Prendergast shot him, then reached over and grabbed the rifle from the other guard's hand. After knocking the guard down, Prendergast again ran for the sandbar.[113]

He had seen the helicopters coming in at a distance and figured that if he could get far enough away from shore, he stood a good chance of being picked up. There followed a near-Keystone Cops chase, as

Prendergast ran awhile, turned and fired at the pursuing Militia, waved at them, ducked (they were shooting at him in earnest at that point), fired again and ran on. Finally, he reached the sandbar just as a helicopter swooped in. He scrambled for the hoist, climbed on it, and the helicopter dashed out to sea. From the time they were hit until the time he was recovered was 40 minutes.[114/]

CHAPTER V

EPILOGUE

The foregoing experiences of evasion and escape could not possibly cover all of those who managed to come back, but they have served as a representative illustration of E and E in the Southeast Asia theater. Many have not returned, and their stories may never be told; many of those believed captured and held as POWs may return, and at that time, a fuller knowledge of the realities of Prisoner of War life may be gained.

As of the writing of this report, the Jungle Survival School training, and that of Life Support Equipment, continued to evolve, passing along the old and newly gained body of knowledge to incoming Southeast Asia aircrews.

Joint Personnel Recovery Center

The outlook for recovery was not abandoned when a SAR effort was terminated, for whatever reason. In 1966, a new organization was formed under the aegis of COMUSMACV. This recovery organization, initiated in November of that year, was called the Joint Personnel Recovery Center (JPRC). Its primary mission was to effect recovery of long term evaders or escapees, and to do this, it compiled an extensive dossier on each unrecovered crewmember immediately upon cessation of the SAR effort.[115/]

The dossier contained a complete description of all the circumstances surrounding the loss, including the location, time, and known or assumed condition of the possible survivor. His picture and vital statistics were in the dossier, along with all available information about his background. His Authenticator Card was included.[116/]

When any intelligence was received, for example, about suspected POW compounds, possible Americans in the hands of the enemy, or the like, the JPRC correlated the information in the dossiers with the incoming intelligence. In this way they attempted to establish the possibility of successful recovery, either by friendly indigenous personnel, or the insertion of well-trained U.S. troops.[117/] These teams worked under the code name of "Bright Light," and were dedicated troops especially trained for search and recovery of injured or disabled personnel. In addition, there were several areas in Laos designated "Safe Areas" which were briefed to all combat crews, updated as necessary, and checked regularly.[118/]

The seven-year period had shown a quantum step in the tactics, techniques, training, and equipment used in personnel recovery between 1964 and 1971. The lessons learned, and experiences documented, were passed on to those who might yet have to use them.

FOOTNOTES

1. (S/NF) PACAF Evasion and Recovery Report No. 80. (Extracted portions have been edited to delete material irrelevant to the chapter.)
2. Ibid.
3. (S) Project CHECO Southeast Asia Digest, Jan 68, p. 9.
4. (S) PACAF Evasion and Recovery Report No. 146. (Undtd)
5. (S) Project CHECO SEA Digest, Jan 68, p. 12.
6. (S) PACAF Evasion and Recovery Report No. 146.
7. Ibid.
8. (S) Interview by CHECO personnel with Capt Byron E. Voorhis, 3rd ARRG, 3 Jan 67.
9. (U) Corona Harvest Report, "Physical and Cultural Environment of Southeast Asia, 1 Nov 68.
10. (U) PACAF Jungle Survival School Syllabus of Instruction, 1970.
11. (U) Discussions with Major Gordon H. Lowery, Commandant, Jungle Survival School, Clark AB, P.I., and CMSgt Anthony J. Martino, NCOIC of the school, 30 Dec 71 to 3 Jan 72.
12. Ibid. Also, (U) JSS Syllabus.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid. Also (U) Corona Harvest Physical and Cultural Environment Report, SEA, 1 Nov 68.
16. Ibid. Also (S) Study by author of over 600 PACAF, SERE, and Hq 7AF Survivor Debriefs and Narratives. Hereafted cited as "Study of Debriefs."
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid. Also (U) Life Nature Library pub, "The Land and Wildlife of Tropical Asia."
19. Ibid.

20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.

22. Ibid.

23. (C) SERE Newsletter, "The Dengler Debriefing," Fleet Intelligence Center, Pacific, 5 Oct 66.

24. (U) Author's personal experience, 310th Air Commando Squadron, Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN, 1963-1965. Also, Interview with MSgt Richard N. Darco, 360th TEWS E & E Briefing NCOIC, 21-23 Dec 1971.

25. (U) 13th AF Histories, Jul-Dec 70 and Jan-Jun 71. (Hereafter cited as "13th AF Histories.")

26. Ibid.

27. (U) Interview with TSgt Bruce H. Freeland, Stan Eval Section of Jungle Survival School, 3 Jan 72. (Sgt Freeland had been one of the four original PCS personnel assigned to then-PJSS in June 65.)

28. (U) 13th AF History, 1 Jan-30 Jun 63, p. II-113.

29. (U) Interview with TSgt Freeland.

30. Ibid. Also, Discussions with Major Lowery and CMSgt Martino.

31. Ibid.

32. Ibid.

33. (U) Discussions with Major Lowery.

34. Ibid.

35. (U) Interview with TSgt Freeland. Also, (U) Discussions with CMSgt Martino and Major Lowery.

36. Ibid. Also, (S) Study of Debriefs.

37. (U) Jungle Survival School Syllabus.

38. (U) Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Donald L. Muir, Chief, Life Support Division, Hq 7AF DOOL, 28 Dec 71. (Hereafter cited as "Interviews with Lt Col Muir.")

39. (U) Interview with SSgt Steven J. Didier, Stan/Eval Radio Specialist Jungle Survival School, Clark AB, 1 Jan 72. (Hereafter cited as "Interview with SSgt Didier.")

40. Ibid.

41. (S) Study of Debriefs. Also (U) Also PACAF Reg 501-6, 16 Jul 71.

42. (U) Discussions with Major Lowery and CMSgt Martino.

43. (U) Interviews with Lt Col Muir.

44. (U) Discussions with CMSgt Martino.

45. (U) Interviews with Lt Col Muir. Also, (U) Discussions with Major Lowery and CMSgt Martino.

46. (U) Flow Chart at JSS, Clark AB, P.I.

47. (U) 13th AF Histories.

48. Ibid.

49. Ibid.

50. (U) Discussions with Major Lowery and CMSgt Martino.

51. (U) Interview with Lt Col Muir.

52. (U) Author's personal observation, 30 Dec 71-3 Jan 72, at JSS, Clark AB, P.I.

53. (S) Narrative Debrief of E & E Experience, by Captain Lester O'Brian, 432nd TRW, to JSS class at Clark AB, P.I., 30 Dec 71.

54. Ibid.

55. (U) Jungle Survival School Syllabus.

56. (S) PACAF Evasion and Recovery Report No. 325. Recoverees: Captain Ted G. Sweeting, Aircraft Commander, and 1st Lt David L. Yates, 388th TFW, Korat RTAFB, Thailand.

57. Ibid.

58. (S) PACAF Evasion and Recovery Report No. 323. Recoverees: Major Richard E. Moffit, AC, and Lt Col Donald A. Kellum, navigator, 460th TRW, Tan Son Nhut AB, RVN.

59. Ibid.

60. (U) Author's observation, JSS, 30 Dec 71-3 Jan 72.

61. (S) 2nd Air Division Evasion and Escape Newsletter, 9 Jun 1965.

62. Ibid.

63. Ibid.

64. Ibid.

65. Ibid.

66. (S/NF) Project CHECO Report, "Search and Rescue in SEA, 1961-66," published 24 Oct 66. (Hereafter cited as "SAR in SEA, 61-66.")

67. (S) Project CHECO Report, "USAF Search and Rescue, Jul 66-Nov 67," published 19 Jan 68. (Hereafter cited as "USAF SAR, 66-67.")

68. Ibid.

69. (S/NF) SAR in SEA, 61-66.

70. (S) PACAF Evasion and Recovery Report No. 305. (Undtd) Recovery effected 12 Jan 70. Recoveree: Capt Lawrence C. Johnson, 374 TAW.

71. (C) PACAF Evasion and Recovery Report No. 290. (Undtd) Recovery effected 6 Aug 69. Recoveree: Lt Roger P. Busico, 31st TFW.

72. Ibid.

73. Ibid.

74. (S) PACAF Evasion and Recovery Report No. 275. (Undtd) Recovery effected 29 Mar 69. Recoveree: Lt Ronald D. Stafford, 388th TFW.

75. Ibid.

76. Ibid.

77. Ibid.

78. (C) PACAF Evasion and Recovery Report No. 278. (Undtd) Recovery effected 12 Apr 69. Recoveree: Captain Charles Mattern, 460 TRW.

79. Ibid.

80. (S) PACAF Evasion and Recovery Report No. 299. (Undtd) Recovery effected 7 Dec 69. Recoveree: Lt Woodrow J. Bergeron, Jr.

81. Ibid.

82. (S) Project CHECO Report, "Rescue at Ban Phanop," 15 Feb 70.

83. Ibid.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid.

86. (S) PACAF E & E Report No. 299.

87. Ibid.

88. (S) "Rescue at Ban Phanop."

89. Ibid.

90. Ibid.

91. (S) PACAF Evasion and Recovery Report No. 313. (Undtd) Recovery effected 21 Mar 70.

92. Ibid.

93. Ibid.

94. Ibid.

95. Ibid.

96. Ibid.

97. Ibid.

98. (S) SERE Newsletter, Fleet Intelligence Center, Pacific, June 1969.

99. (C) Memo for Record, Subj: USAF NCOs Detained by VC, 15 Nov 65.

100. (S) Evasion and Escape Report No. 8, DCS/Intelligence, Hq USAF, 8 June 68.

101. (S/NF) Hq 7th AF Weekly Air Intelligence Summary, 21 Aug 71.

102. Ibid.

103. Ibid.

104. Ibid.

105. (C) The Dengler Debrief, SERE, Fleet Intelligence Center, Pacific, 5 October 66.

106. Ibid.

107. (C) SERE Debriefing of LTJG Frank S. Prendergast, USNR, by Fleet Intelligence Center, Pacific, 1 Jun 1967.

108. Ibid.

109. Ibid.

110. Ibid.

111. Ibid.

112. Ibid.

113. Ibid.

114. Ibid.

115. (S/NF) 7AF Combat Crew Brief, 3 August 67. Also (S/NF) Interview with Maj Gerald Bauknight, JPRC, 2 Dec 71.

116. (S/NF) Interview with Major Bauknight.

117. (S/NF) Combat Crew Brief and Interview with Major Bauknight.

118. (S/NF) 7AF Evasion Escape News, 21 Mar 68.

GLOSSARY

AAA	Antiaircraft Artillery
AMC	Airborne Mission Commander
Bullpup	Radio-guided, rocket propelled missile
CBU	Cluster Bomb Unit
COMUSMACV	Commander, U.S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam
E & E	Evasion and Escape
FAC	Forward Air Controller
FE	Flight Engineer
"G"	Gravity or acceleration force
JEST	Jungle Environmental Survival School
JPRC	Joint Personnel Recovery Center
JSS	Jungle Survival School
KIA	Killed in Action
LPU	Life Preserver, Underarm (Inflatable)
MHz	Mega-Hertz (Million Cycles per Second)
MIA	Missing in Action
Paveway	Laser-guided bomb
PJ	Pararescue Jumper
PJSS	PACAF Jungle Survival School
PLD	Personnel Lowering Device
PLSS	PACAF Life Support School
POW	Prisoner of War
RCA	Riot Control Agent (CS-1, CS-2, CBU-19/30, BLU-52)
SAR	Search and Rescue
SARTF	SAR Task Force
SEA	Southeast Asia
SERE	Survival, Evasion, Resistance, Escape
UHF	Ultra High Frequency
Walleye	TV-guided glide bomb

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